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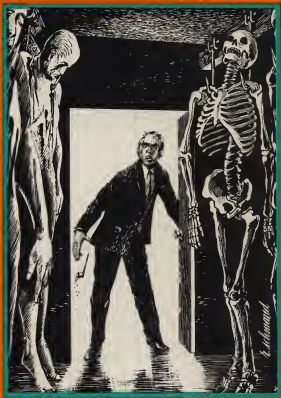
THE VAULTS OF YOH-VOMBIS

by CLARK ASHTON SMITH



Jules de Grandin in THE BRIDE OF DEWER

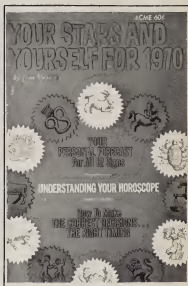
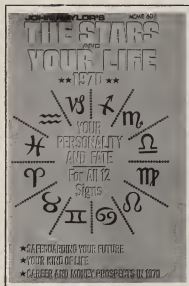
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Volume 3

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, Editor

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The Editor's Page

Not having read everything, I dare not assert that G.K. Chesterton's detective, Father Brown, is unique in the annals of mystery fiction. I can only say with certainty that I have never read about the exploits of another fictional detective who even remotely resembles him. How he came into being is more certainly unique in the annals of the generation and birth of fictional detectives.

On a particular occasion prior to 1910, Chesterton met a curate of the Roman Catholic Church, Father John O'Connor, and the two took an instant liking to each other, although the author was not a Roman Catholic at the time (and would not become one until 1922.) At a later meeting, Chesterton mentioned to Father (later Monsignor) O'Connor that he proposed to write in support of a particular proposition relating to some of the more unsavory aspects of vice and crime. Fr. O'Connor considered his new friend's views in error. "He told me certain facts he knew about perverted practices," Chesterton relates. "I did not imagine that the world could contain such horrors."

And hard upon this experience, the two men encountered some Cambridge undergraduates who were talking with naive learnedness about the deplorable ignorance of the realities of life on the part of priests and religious, etc., who were cloistered comfortably away from the actual facts and events of life. These two incidents – the revelation of matters

unknown to a man who considered himself sophisticated in the ways of the world from a source he had heretofore imagined as ignorant of them, and a prime example of youthful ignorance proclaiming itself with cocksure arrogance – fertilized the egg which would hatch the most bizarre detective that I have encountered in mystery fiction.

"Has it not struck you," Father Brown says to Flambeau in *The Blue Cross*, "that a man who does next to nothing but hear man's real sins is not likely to be wholly unaware of human evil?" Thus we have the ground rules, as it were, upon which the series is written. Father Brown always looks like the "simple-minded, superstitious, etc." country priest, and the various other persons in the stories voice the customary misimpressions of priests, Catholicism, Christianity as relating to the teachings of its Founder, etc., invariably revealing themselves unable to see what is plainly before their eyes.

I doubt if there ever was, or ever will be, a real Roman Catholic priest quite like him, although I should not be surprised to find a real priest with a comparable knowledge of contemporary criminal tactics and universal vice and perversion derived from hearing confessions. (Oddly, Fr. Brown never, to my recollection, refers to books as a source for such knowledge. I should imagine that a real priest would draw upon both, were he to attempt detective

work.) But in some ways, he is too large for life and in others too small. In fact, he is barely characterized at all. I have re-read all of the stories, and while I am well aware of Fr. Brown's convictions on a wide variety of subjects, I find that I know less about him as an individual (as opposed to the *kind* of person he is) than I do about the Chevalier Dupin from the three stories by Poe.

His method is unique. He sees the Truth about the crimes that come to his attention through a sort of spiritual exercise where he puts himself into the spiritual condition of the criminal. Thus he knows how the crime was done, why, and by whom. This is explained in reasonable detail – it's not as simple-minded as this sounds – in *The Secret of Father Brown* and *The Secret of Flambeau*, where he seeks to show that there is nothing occult or supernatural about him and his manner of detecting. Whether anyone alive (even a real priest with Fr. Brown's fund of information) could actually do this with anything like Brown's record of success is at best unsettled. We'll just have to suspend disbelief, if we find the stories worth the effort.

The entire series is, in one way, all of a piece; all were written according to the basic rule; everything else in the paraphernalia of detective fiction is considered expendable. In one story, the mystery is solved but we do not learn the name of the culprit (*The Curse of the Golden Cross*); in another, we do not know whether the culprit is ever caught or not (*The Actor and the Alibi*); in another, the solution reveals a public deception, but so far as we know, it is never exposed (*The Duel of Dr. Hirsch*); in still another, the truth about a famous historical character is brought to light by Father Brown, who decides that, since no one was unjustly blamed in the official account, nothing is to be gained

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by broadcasting the actual facts. Let a dead scoundrel be considered a great hero and an inspiration to young and old, for the evil that he has done died with him, so far as the general public is concerned. Once the mystery has been solved, Father Brown often has no further interest in the case, and certainly no interest in police and court work.

The ground rule is that he must be discounted as unworthy of attention or even notice by most of the others — certainly by the transients. (In any story we may encounter someone who has had previous experience with Fr. Brown and thus does not discount him.) The purpose of all this, however, is not to inject Roman Catholic propaganda (most of Fr. Brown's discourses amount to plain common sense about human nature and human behavior, so plain as to be highly uncommon), but rather to delight and baffle the reader with an essentially simple mystery that appears to be complex — and often positively supernatural — because the others in the story are so easily taken in by popular misconceptions and superstitions, as well as custom. You will nearly always find some sort of moral comment, but not put forth offensively; and again, it nearly always breaks down to common sense, or matters with which you may find yourself in agreement.

For example, the "moral" of *The Invisible Man* can be stated as "everybody counts". The culprit in this story has not found a means of making himself actually invisible, as in H.G. Wells' excellent novel with the same title; many persons of the story *did* see him, but did not notice him for a particular reason, so that they swore later (believing themselves truthful) that they saw no one.

Fr. Brown is described as "a very short Roman Catholic priest," he had a

face as round and dull as a Norfolk dumpling; he had eyes as empty as the North Sea; he had several brown paper parcels which he was quite incapable of collecting." "He had a large, shabby umbrella, which constantly fell on the floor. He did not seem to know which was the right end of his return ticket." (Quotations are from *The Blue Cross*.)

Unprepossessing, clumsy, absent-minded, and seemingly incompetent, Fr. Brown can overcome all of this when the occasion demands. One of Chesterton's jokes (for these are subtly humorous stories as well as fascinating mysteries) is that most people are nearly always mistaken about just when Fr. Brown should snap out of his reveries and show himself as a person who can make an impression on other persons. He hardly ever does so at times when it seems that he should - but we always see in the end that it was our own naive assumptions which made us look for action at the wrong time. *The Blue Cross* leads off the first collection of Father Brown stories, and may have been the first one written (I have not seen a list showing their original order of publication.) It is told from the viewpoint of Valentin, "the head of the Paris police and the most famous investigator of the world" who is on the trail of the notorious criminal, Flambeau. "... in his best days (I mean, of course, his worst) Flambeau was a figure as statuesque and international as the Kaiser."

The police believe that Flambeau will be disguised as some minor clerk or secretary connected with the Eucharistic Congress then taking place in London. Flambeau is a master of disguise, but he cannot disguise his height; so this short, clumsy priest cannot be the notorious thief. Fr. Brown is telling people that he has to be careful with his packages, because one of them has something made of real silver, with blue stones.

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This, of course, is the famous Blue Cross, a prize well worth Flambeau's attention.

Valentine gets side-tracked through no fault of his own, and goes into a restaurant for coffee. He puts sugar in it, to find, when he tastes it that the sugar bowl is filled with salt — and then finds that sugar is in the salt shaker. While calling the waiter, he also notices a splash of some dark fluid on the walls. The proprietor says it must have been the two clergymen who played the trick, for one of them threw soup at the wall, just before leaving.

Valentin goes out and at a fruiterer's open-air display not far down the street, notices that the price tags in the Brazil nuts and oranges have been switched. He questions the shopman, who tells of two clergymen, one of whom upset his basket of apples. They went thataway, the furious shopman declares.

Now he starts to look for odd occurrences, and when he comes across a restaurant (some time later) with a smashed window, he immediately goes in to inquire. Yes, indeed — two clergymen. They had a "cheap and quiet little lunch," and one of them paid for it and went out. The other was just about to follow when the waiter noticed that the first priest had paid much too much — about three times too much. He looks at the check, and finds that it reads 14 shillings when he was certain that he had made it out to 4 shillings, the correct figure. Then, the waiter continues, "The parson at the door he says all serene, 'Sorry to confuse your accounts, but it'll pay for the window.'" "What window?" I says. "The one I'm going to break," he says, and smashed that blessed pane with his umbrella."

The pursuit continues, and it looks as if the two delinquent clergymen are heading toward Hampstead Heath. Twilight is coming on, as Valentin steps in to a confectionery store and buys

some chocolate, looking around to see if there is any evidence here of the parsons' passage. He doesn't see any, but when the woman in the shop sees his uniform she tells him that if he has come about the parcel, she's already sent it off.

Yes, indeed, it's the priestly pair. But a different twist this time. No outrages at all. The two came in, talked for a while, bought some peppermints, then went off towards the Heath. A moment later, one comes back and asks if he left a parcel. The woman looks, but can't find any. The priest tells her not to worry, but should she come upon it later, would she please mail it to a particular address, and he leaves her the address and a shilling to pay for the postage and her trouble. And, though she thought she'd looked everywhere, sure enough, she comes upon it later, so has mailed it as requested – to some place in Westminster.

Valentin finally catches up with the two jokers in clerical clothes (he has other police with him) and comes upon the pair, who are apparently having some sort of theological discussion:

"The first he heard was the tail of one of Father Brown's sentences, which ended: '... what they really meant in the Middle Ages by the heavens being incorruptible.'

"The taller priest nodded his bowed head and said: 'Ah, yes, these modern infidels appeal to their reason; but who can look at these millions of worlds and not feel that there may well be wonderful universes above us where reason is utterly unreasonable?'"

Shortly thereafter, the tall priest suggests that the short one hand over the Blue Cross, as they are all alone and he could easily pull the short little fellow to pieces. Father Brown declines, whereupon Flambeau says, of course he won't, because he, himself, Flambeau already has it. He had the sense to make a duplicate of the right parcel, and now

Fr. Brown has the duplicate and Flambeau has the Blue Cross.

Father Brown says no, he left the right one behind at the sweet shop (actually, he left it there when he went back to ask if he had left it,) so the Blue Cross is now in the mails, en route to a friend in Westminster. Flambeau tears open the parcel he has switched from Fr. Brown, and finds it is a dummy. Furious, he declares he doesn't believe that such a bumpkin like Brown could do it, and if Fr. Brown doesn't produce it, he'll take it by force. We're all alone, he says.

Then Fr. Brown reveals himself, for the first time in the long series of tales.

" 'Behind that tree,' said Father Brown, pointing, 'are two strong policemen and the greatest detective alive. How did they come here, do you ask? Why, I brought them of course! How did I do it? Why, I'll tell you if you like! Lord bless you, we have to know twenty such things when we work among the criminal classes! Well, I wasn't sure you were a thief, and it would never do to make a scandal against one of our own clergy. So I just tested you to see if anything would make you show yourself. A man generally makes a small scene if he finds salt in his coffee; if he doesn't, he has some reason for keeping quiet. I changed the salt and sugar, and *you* kept quiet. A man generally objects if his bill is three times too big. If he pays for it, he has some motive for passing unnoticed. I altered your bill, and *you* paid it.' "

And, of course, all the tricks – none of them really harmful, and Flambeau had paid for the broken window – were to leave a trail the police could follow. He mentions some aspects of the thieves' trade (remember this is prior to 1910) that make Flambeau gasp with horror. Fr. Brown is gratified that Flambeau doesn't know one of the foulest, and when the tall criminal asks him how he

(Turn to page 118)

The Infernal Shadow

by Hugh B. Cave

(author of *The Door of Doom*)

IT WAS ONE O'CLOCK on that fateful morning of December 14, 1931 when Mark Mallory called me. A dismal hour, with rain drooling down the windows of my study and a chill wind whining against the glass. And Mallory's cracked voice, coming over the wire, was harsh, uncontrolled, excited.

"Doctor Lovell?" he demanded. "Lovell, my daughter is dying—horribly! Come at once, man! Hurry!"

The phone clicked. An instant later I had closed the door of my room and was walking fretfully through the restive semidarkness of Cheyney Lane.

I had no time to wonder or be bewildered. Mallory's residence was close by, across the square, in After Street. More than once during the past months I had had access to that huge gloomy structure of hypocrisy and hate, and always I had dreaded the next visit. Now, before many minutes had passed, I found myself

Misty, huge, bluish hands appear in the library of Mark Mallory's home, seeking a throat to encircle and crush . . .

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ascending the gleaming stone steps, and pressing the bell, and pacing along the low unlighted corridor with Mark Mallory himself before me.

He said nothing. At once he led me to the great central staircase and thence to a chamber on the floor above. Here, holding the door open for me, he allowed me to enter ahead of him.

And Anne Forsythe was dead. There was no question of it. A single glance at those twisted features, at the queerly distorted position of her head, was quite sufficient. I said simply: "I can do nothing. It is too late."

Mallory glared at me. From the set stare of his eyes I guessed that my words were no surprise to him. But he said thickly, gutturally: "Look at her throat."

I turned the girl's head gently. Presumably she had fallen or been struck upon the head by something. Without a doubt the spinal column and cord were shattered.

"She died almost instantly," I said. "Her neck is broken."

"And there are no fingermarks, Lovell! No fingermarks!"

"What?" I frowned, staring at him.

"There should be marks," he muttered. "She's dead, Lovell. Dead! She was gone before I called you. Her neck—broken—and no sign of fingermarks. . . ."

He drew me outside and closed the door abruptly. I followed him, utterly confounded, down the winding stairs to the floor below. There at the bottom of the stairs he swung on me with sudden vehemence.

"She was murdered," he said hoarsely. "Do you know that? Do you?"

I could only gape back into his fixed glare and stand motionless. Before I could grope for a reply he took my arm violently and dragged me into his study. Here he motioned me to a seat, and then, standing before me in that small, dimly lighted room, he described to me, nervously and harshly, the first event in that strange affair of the bleak house in After Street.

"My daughter's husband," he blurted, "is now on his way to the police. He left as soon as she died. Captain Forsythe is a soldier, Lovell. A man more given to vengeance than to grief. Headstrong, violent. Determined to bring the murderer to a terrible justice."

Mallory leaned forward abruptly, poking at my shoulder. "Mind you," he said, lowering his voice, "what I'm going to tell you is only hearsay. He told it to me."

I nodded. I knew Mark Mallory better than he knew himself. I had been his private physician, his nurse, his keeper if you like, for longer than I cared to remember. An eccentric old man, full of hates and whims and habits and petty lusts. He was not Anne Forsythe's father, but her stepfather. He disliked her; he resented Forsythe's love for her; he distrusted even me.

"Tonight after I had retired," he said suspiciously, "Forsythe and his wife sat in the library, reading. The library is a big room,

I was silent.

"It's beyond you," he nodded, bending closer. "I thought it would be, Lovell. Too much for you. You don't believe in the supernatural."

I was still silent. Did I believe in the supernatural? Did I believe that a door could open under the pressure of hairy horror-fingers? Or that the same fingers could crush the life from Jean Forsythe's young wife and leave no mark, no slightest print, on her throat as evidence of their actuality?

It was strange business. Forsythe himself had told this improbable story; and Forsythe had been alone with Anne at the time of the murder. There was something underhanded here. Yet surely if the man were inventing an alibi to cover himself, he would have chosen some yarn that the police would be more likely to credit! He was a soldier, a sane man. He would not expect any living soul to accept this fantastic tale of supernatural fingers!

I sat there, pondering over it. Did I believe? Did I suspect

But I was not forced to answer Mark Mallory's question. His voice came to me abruptly, disrupting my morbid thoughts. And I found myself suddenly staring at the door of the study.

"Lovell, I want you to meet Captain Forsythe and"

His second introduction was hardly necessary. The man who stood there, beside the powerful, rangy form of Captain Jean Forsythe, was a man who had been with me on more than one suspicious case. Thomas Drake, the cleverest police inspector at headquarters!

I took his hand silently. There were many times when Drake had been more than welcome, but on that fearful night in Mallory's grim house on After Street I could have thrown my arms around him and cried out with relief. He was the one stolid indifferent power of reason so sorely needed in our little house party of horror.

And as usual, he wasted no time. He stepped past me casually and stood by the table, glancing at all of us with vague interest.

"I've heard very little of the story," he said. "If one of you will outline the events of the evening from the very start, I'd be grateful."

He waited. And so once again I heard the story of the unknown monster which had murdered Anne Forsythe. This time the story came from the lips of the one man who had witnessed that murder, and came with a grim deliberation that removed my suspicion of the man's guilt. His description was so fiercely and undramatically told that he could not have been inventing it for our benefit. He simply couldn't. And his face, too, showed a fearful strain which could not have been assumed without real cause.

His story was, except for a single significant detail, no different from Mallory's. That solitary point of variation was Jean Forsythe's concluding statement.

"I carried her out of the room and into the corridor," he said. "There I turned to go up the stairs, and at the end of the hall I saw a shadowy form in the darkness. It wasn't a man; I'd swear to it. It was something squat and deformed. Something—well, like a monkey."

"You're quite sure," Drake suggested quietly, "that you didn't see this same shadow at the moment of your wife's death scream? You're positive it wasn't standing at the back of her chair, throttling her?"

"I tell you, sir" —Forsythe's face was livid— "the room was empty. Empty, do you hear? There was nothing behind her chair!"

"All right," Drake shrugged. "I'll have to look about. You've examined the victim, Lovell? Of course. No fingerprints. No — anything. Well, come along with me."

He paced out and I followed him. As we moved along the main corridor toward the library, a clock somewhere above us struck a single note. It was half past two o'clock.

I will not attempt to describe our search. Enough to say that it lasted more than an hour and that it uncovered an unusual number of narrow gloomy passages and cell-like rooms. Mark Mallory, with his stepdaughter and her husband, had inhabited

Lovell, with a single table against the fireplace. You know; you've been in it more than once, snooping around. Jean and Anne were seated on opposite sides of the table there.

"There's only one door to the library, Lovell. Only one door, and it leads out on the lower corridor. According to Forsythe that door opened with a sharp click and swung inward, as if the wind had blown it open. But there was no wind, or any draft in the hall. I won't have windows open at night, Lovell. You know that. And they weren't open tonight or any other night. If that door opened, it was opened by somebody with a pair of hands, Lovell, and the knob turned.

"But the doorway was empty, Jean says. He picked up his book again and went on reading. For about two minutes—maybe more— he gazed down at the book. Then, all at once from the other side of the table, Anne screamed. A horrible scream, Lovell. Horrible! So Forsythe says."

"You don't believe him?" I suggested.

"Believe him? Let me finish, and decide for yourself. I was saying, Jean dropped his book again and stared across at his wife in amazement. He jerked to his feet just in time, horrified as a pair of misty, huge bluish hands encircled her throat. Those hands, he says, snapped her out of the chair with such uncanny strength that her scream died instantly. Mind you, Lovell, there wasn't a living thing near her. Not a suggestion of any human form. Yet she was whipped out of the chair with awful quickness, and those unattached hands broke her!

"Forsythe got to her side somehow, just as the hands darted back and dangled in midair. The girl slumped down. There was a sudden sucking, scraping sound and a rush of air, and the hands were gone. Huge hairy hands, Lovell, distorted beyond belief. And the girl was dead. Dead with a broken neck."

"And Forsythe," I said, "told you this?"

He glared at me balefully for a moment, as if expecting me to say something more violent. Then, with a shrug: "Jean took his wife to her room," he said curtly. "That was about quarter to one. He called me immediately. I sent for you. What do you think, Lovell? Hey? What do you think?"

only a small portion of the immense structure. The remaining rooms and corridors were closed.

Yet for all its age and desertion, the great house offered not the slightest clue to our fantastic mystery. Its rooms were dark and shadow-filled, but empty. Its halls were sinister and unsavory, but abandoned. There was nothing.

"Who owns this place?" Drake demanded of me as he groped along an upper hall, in the dark. "Mallory?"

I told him what I knew. The house belonged to the murdered girl and had for years been the town house of her family. Mallory had come into it as a stepfather, shortly before the death of Anne's mother.

"Any hard feelings anywhere?" Drake quizzed.

"I believe there are," I replied cautiously. "In fact, I'm quite sure that"

But Drake was not listening to me. He was rattling the knob of a narrow little door in the wall beside him, and frowning impatiently. The door was locked. Drake stood quite still and stared at it thoughtfully, and I could read his mind. The other doors, the other corridors, had been deserted and bleak, but open. This door, of the entire network of shadows, was the only one to which we had been denied access.

"What's this room?" Drake demanded.

"His laboratory."

"His what?"

"That answers your other question. Mallory is a bit queer, Drake. Has odd ideas. He potters about up here at all hours of the night, fiddling with chemicals and whatnots."

"Hm-m. And they didn't like it?"

"The girl resented it. She—well, she was afraid sometimes about Mallory being up here alone. She didn't know just what to think. The place was dreadful enough at night, she used to tell me, without having strange noises and creaks and mutterings in the unused rooms."

"And Forsythe?"

"He was bitter. Very bitter. He doesn't get along with the old

man at all, and hasn't for a long time. There's a very genuine hate between the two. A smoldering, silent sort of hate, Drake."

Drake glanced at me significantly but said nothing. He stared at the door again, and rattled it; then he nodded and turned away. I trailed him back through the maze of gloomy passageways in complete silence. And so, at the end of our unpleasant tour, we came again to the lower hall and found Mallory and Captain Forsythe awaiting us in the library.

"You've found something?" Forsythe asked eagerly.

"I'd like to have a look at a certain locked room up there," Drake scowled.

Mallory's fingers strained slightly on the arm of his chair. He frowned, then deliberately forced his frown into a vague smile.

"My private laboratory, Mr. Drake," he said casually. "I keep it locked because the room sometimes contains a number of very delicate —er — experiments. I'll answer for that room. The only time it is entered is when I enter it. I have the only key."

"But not the only hands," Drake retorted softly. "And locks can be forced. I must insist, Mr. Mallory."

"You—insist?"

"Sorry, but I must."

Mallory's smile thinned visible, but he shrugged and turned toward the staircase. "Very well," he said. "Come."

I caught Drake's significant glance, and would have followed. But Mallory stiffened, glaring at me. "You must come alone, Drake," the old man snapped. "My laboratory is not a public sitting room."

And so I stood very still, while Mallory and my friend vanished into the shadows. For some time I stood there, concerned with my own thoughts. Forsythe finally touched my sleeve and said quietly: "Shall we wait in the study, Doctor?"

I nodded, and followed him. We sat down in silence, with the lamp between us; and presently Forsythe bent forward to say in a low voice: "Doctor, I wish you'd stay here tonight."

"Here?" I frowned.

"In the house. I've a premonition that more will happen. You

can call your housekeeper and let her know, and if any calls come for you they can be sent here."

"You think it is that important?"

"I am sure of it, Doctor. Will you—grant me that much?"

I hesitated. It seemed unnecessary, and I had really had quite enough of this ghastly place. But other things had to be considered. My profession is one which hangs upon the good will of my clients; and Jean Forsythe was a man of influence. Under the circumstances I could hardly risk his disapproval and condemnation by refusing him in an hour of need, whether the need was imaginary or real.

"I'll stay," I nodded. "If you wish it, I'll stay."

"And—you'll speak to Drake? You'll ask him to stay also?"

"Is that necessary?"

"It is safer, Lovell."

"I'll talk to him," I said lamely.

A smile crossed Forsythe's face, and he was silent after that. We simply sat there, each with his own thoughts, and waited. And at last Mallory and Drake returned from their inspection of the laboratory.

"Well, that's that," Drake said petulantly. "We can't do anything more. Have to wait for something to develop."

"You think something will?"

"Don't know what to think," Drake shrugged.

I drew him aside and told him, very quietly, what Forsythe had requested. He glanced at me queerly and said, after a moment's hesitation: "Queer, Lovell. Damned queer. I had an idea he'd be glad to get rid of both of us."

"Then you'll stay?"

"Believe I will, for a while at least. We might not have to remain long. There's danger, Lovell. Want to take a chance?"

"You found something upstairs?"

"No. Nothing but a queer notion of my own. But we'll see. We'll see before long."

He turned and spoke to Mallory, announcing his intention of staying the night. Then he moved toward the door, and in silence

we followed him out. Mallory closed the door after us and led the way to the great staircase.

"There is a telephone in the corridor above," he said irritably, "if you wish to use it. I am going to bed."

He scuffed away. I was watching him from where I stood at the foot of the banister. I had just drawn a cigarette from my case, and was lighting it, when suddenly I saw Mallory, already halfway up the incline, draw a white handkerchief from his coat pocket. With the kerchief, as he drew it out, came a small gray box—a little square container about the size of a tin of aspirin tablets. It fell upon the stairs at Drake's feet, as Drake followed him.

The thing made no sound on the thick carpet. Mallory was not aware that he had dropped it, for he did not hesitate in the ascent. He hobbled on up, gripping the rail with bony hands and wheezing with the effort. But Drake, with a sweep of his hand, scooped up the box as he stepped past.

I stood there, staring. Instead of handing the box to Mallory, Drake dropped it into his own pocket. An instant later I heard the old man pointing out to him the door of his room on the floor above. And then, at my side, came Captain Forsythe's summons.

"Come, Doctor. Let me show you to your room. You've earned a rest, God knows."

And so, following him, I climbed the stairs.

It was an hour later, after I had retired, when the door of my room opened softly. I heard Drake's whispered command for silence. Then the detective stood beside me, holding that little gray box in his hand.

"Lovell, listen to me," he said. "You heard Forsythe's story of the shadow in the lower hall. Look at this!"

With unemotional fingers he removed the cover of Mallory's tiny box and held it out to me. I examined it, bewildered. The box contained a small phial half full of brownish liquid. It might have been tincture of iodine except that it had a decided lackluster appearance. I took the phial and lifted it to my nose. It had no noticeable odor.

Then, as I was about to replace the tube in its former position, I saw something more. A folded bit of paper lay in the bottom of the box, barely visible. I opened it cautiously. It was a brief note, written in a peculiarly stilted upright hand, as if the writer had been a man unused to penning English script. I read the note carefully; and as I read it, the sense of horror which swept over me must have been visible, for Drake smiled thinly.

It was terse, straight to the point. And it was signed at the bottom with a single significant word—Reigmann. Reigmann! The name of Germany's most distinguished contemporary medical genius!

"Mean anything to you, Lovell?" Drake demanded softly. He must have known that it did. He could not have failed to see the sudden tightening of my face.

"Mean anything? It might mean everything!" I exclaimed. "Doctor Reigmann is the most renowned medical . . ."

Drake listened very quietly, letting me talk on and on without interruption. I told him what I knew and what I had heard. Reigmann—Franz Reigmann—was a man of fantastic beliefs and practises. A man who had been denounced by every reputable medical society on the Continent. A man who traveled in far places, in strange countries, in pursuit of knowledge. And much more.

When I had finished, Drake was smiling cruelly. "Thanks," he said curtly. "You've helped, Lovell. Helped a lot. Keep your door locked tonight."

And that was all. I heard the door close, and then came the dull tread of Drake's steps as he returned to his own chamber. And I was alone again with the memory of that infernal box and the malignant bit of paper it had contained.

The following day at After Street contained three incidents of importance. The first of them occurred at eight A.M.

I had left my room and closed the door behind me. As I paced along the upper landing I heard the sound of footsteps on the great staircase which stretched down to the floor below. Quickly I advanced to the top and looked down. And there, halfway

down the ramp, I saw Mark Mallory. He was groping slowly to the bottom, holding the rail for support.

Then suddenly he stopped. I saw him glance at his feet with a quick start, and heard the sudden intake of his breath. He bent over abruptly and picked up something that lay on the stairs—something which I recognized instantly as the little gray box which Drake had brought to my room the night before. Mallory dropped it hastily into his pocket—covertly, I thought—and then, with the same shuffling step, he continued down the stairs.

I stood quite still. So Drake, after studying the contents of the box, had replaced it on the stairs in the exact spot where he had found it! He had put it there deliberately, so that Mallory would retrieve it without suspicion. A surge of genuine apprehension came over me as I realized the detective's purpose. Then, before I could turn away, Drake himself stepped out of the darkness and stood at my elbow.

"Shall we go down?" he suggested.

I glanced at him. He must have read the question in my gaze, for he said casually: "I thought it best to return his property. He'd raise the very devil when he missed it. And it may help us to get somewhere. Any rate, it can't do any harm if we're on our mettle."

I trailed him silently down the stairs. At the bottom he turned again to confront me.

"There was a chance, of course," he shrugged, "that Forsythe might precede Mallory this morning. That would've been unfortunate. If Forsythe should see that box . . . However, Jean wasn't well last night. Pretty horrible for him, the whole affair. I guessed he'd be down late."

I could not help but admire Drake's matter-of-fact reasoning. Moreover, his logic was correct, for Forsythe did not descend for more than an hour later. Then his face was still haggard and colorless, and his eyes as he looked into Drake's set features were rimmed with deep red. Evidently he had slept but little during that night of uncertainty.

Yet, in spite of his exhaustion, his fingers closed firmly over

Drake's hand. "Have you found anything Inspector?" he said tensely.

Drake shook his head. I saw his shoulders lift in a shrug of seeming resignation, perhaps to throw Forsythe off guard. "Nothing," he said vaguely. "I'd like to ask you a few—er—rather intimate questions."

Forsythe said nothing.

"Tell me," Drake asked quietly, "has there been anything unusual about Mallory's mail? Has there been, for instance, a certain foreign letter or package that seems to come at regular intervals?"

Forsythe's eyes met Drake's in a puzzled frown. He hesitated; then: "There's been a letter from the French Congo," he said slowly. "A large envelope, bulky, that comes every tenth day."

"Do you know what those envelopes contain?"

Forsythe shook his head. I could see from the smoldering expression of his eyes that he resented this deliberate questioning.

"My dear fellow," he said curtly, "I know nothing whatever about Mark Mallory's affairs. He is nothing to me. I'm not his lackey."

Drake nodded and turned away without a word. He was frowning a little as he walked down the long hall to the library.

That was the second incident. The third, and perhaps the most significant, came at nine o'clock in the evening, when the great house lay once again in gloom.

Forsythe and I sat together in the library. I had just returned from a hurried visit to my own home in Cheyney Lane, and was wondering how much longer this infernal state of inaction would continue. Then the door opened and Drake appeared on the threshold, calling my name. I rose and followed him into the corridor. He said to me, in a guarded voice: "I must have another look at that locked room, Lovell. May need your help."

I glanced toward the library.

"Forsythe won't follow us," Drake said quickly, guessing my thoughts. "He's not the type. As for Mallory, he seems to be nowhere about. I've looked and I can't find him."

I went along without further protest. Drake led the way, and with that almost uncanny sense of direction of his he led me to the very passage which contained the sealed door. Alone, I could never have found that particular corridor, but Drake neither hesitated nor blundered. The passage was unlighted and silent. Our destination lay at the farther end of it.

And here, as we approached the door, Drake's hurried steps slowed to a maddening shuffle. I kept close to him as he groped forward. So close that when he suddenly came to a halt I lurched clumsily against him. I felt his hand on my arm, steadying me and warning me to be still. Then I heard the sound that had reached his ears and caused him to hesitate.

It was the grating noise of a key turning in some nearby lock. Hardly audible, yet unmistakable in the utter stillness of the passage. And its source was obvious. It came from the door before us; and even as we watched, the door opened very slowly with extreme caution. Standing on the sill, blinking at us in the dark, was Mark Mallory.

It was Drake, of course, who accepted the situation first. He stepped toward our host with an abrupt smile.

"Thought I might find you here, Mallory," he said quietly. "I wanted to ask you a very special favor to conduct us through this room of yours. We've gone over the rest of the house pretty thoroughly."

"You have already seen this room once," Mallory snapped.

"True, but Lovell hasn't. Fact is, I'm at my wit's end, and I've got to use Lovell's eyes for a while."

It was a direct challenge and Mallory accepted it as such. He held the door open and motioned us to enter. When we had crossed the sill and he had closed the door after us, he made a light and faced us quietly.

"You are suspicious, of course," he said. "That's quite all right. Quite natural. This door was locked; every other door in the house was open, eh?"

And so for the first time I saw the interior of Mallory's laboratory. It was a small room, dimly and inadequately lighted

by means of a single drop lamp that hung over the long table. Evidently the upper portion of the house had never been wired for electricity, and Mallory had rigged this room himself. The walls were lined with upright cases, filled with a conglomerate mess of instruments and containers. There were test tubes and burners, calipers and slide rules, huge jars of colored acids. A veritable salmagundi of chemical junk.

All this was a first impression, as I stood just inside the door. Then, as I became more accustomed to the faint reddish glow of the chamber, I saw something that really took my fancy. It was a long narrow test tube, propped in the center of a heavy table. From its mouth ran a thick coil of wire, extending through the table top to a boxlike compartment below. In that compartment lay a row of small metallic containers, each one connected by an auxiliary wire to a solid, massive coil above.

The test tube itself was half filled with a bubbling brownish fluid, very similar to iodine. I stepped forward abruptly to examine it. And as I did so, Mallory's fingers dug into my arm and drew me back.

"No, no, Lovell," he said softly, and he was smiling a little as he said it. "Too delicate for clumsy fingers. The rest of my house is open to your infernal curiosity, but here you are my guest."

I glanced at him in surprise. I repeat, he was smiling; but the smile was a grim affair and rather sinister. Moreover, he deliberately placed himself between me and the table, in order that I might not disobey.

"What's the name of the thing?" Drake demanded, staring at the apparatus with an amused grin. "Looks like a tangled bunch of wreckage to me."

Mallory's lips twitched. But Drake's bantering tone brought results. The old man said harshly: "You would change your attitude, sir, if I but mentioned a certain name to you! A name, do you hear? You have heard of Franz Reigmann? No? It is Herr Riegmann's invention you are sneering at!"

"Reigmann, eh?" Drake scowled. "Really?"

"Reigmann and myself," Mallory declared loudly. "The basic principle is his; the improvements are mine. Do you hear? Mine!"

"And—er—you think they're over my head?"

They—" But Mallory caught himself. "That is my own affair," he said curtly. "If you are finished here . . ."

Drake answered with a casual nod. He was disappointed, I am sure. But he stepped to the door and opened it and motioned me to follow him. And as he stood in the shadows of the passage, with that weird red glow reflected in his face, he turned to Mallory and said indifferently:

"Thanks. I'm afraid our mystery is no nearer a solution. I'd hoped to stumble on some sort of clue, Mallory. Something to work on. But—well, thanks for your assistance, anyway."

Then, smiling significantly but saying not a word, Drake stepped back into the darkness and hurried away.

That was nine-thirty. At ten o'clock, as Drake, Captain Forsythe, and I sat restlessly in the library, I heard Mallory mounting the staircase to the upper floor. He had been pacing up and down the corridor for nearly an hour. He did not announce his departure, but under the circumstances I thought it not unusual that he should retire without excusing himself. He was nervous and troubled, and after all we were not his guests in the full sense of the word.

At eleven o'clock Drake glanced at Forsythe significantly and stood up. "I'll have another look around before turning in," he said quietly. And he paced to the door.

At eleven-thirty by the mahogany clock on the mantel, I murmured my excuses to Jean Forsythe and went to my own chamber on the floor above.

And there, less than an hour later, the final drama of that abominable house in After Street began to unfold.

I had closed the door of my room and locked it, remembering Drake' warning. The single light, suspended over the writing table in the corner, was still burning. For perhaps fifteen minutes after entering my room, I had been sitting at that table, under the light, writing a routine report of Anne Forsythe's death.

Then of a sudden the pen slipped from my fingers and I sat up with a jerk. From the corridor outside the closed door of my room came the sound of stealthy footsteps.

I rose quietly, with great haste, and went to the door. For an instant I crouched there, listening intently. The sound continued.

The lock turned noiselessly as I twisted the key. I slid the door open and stepped silently into the passage. It was dark, forbiddingly dark. The light from my table made only a thin silver of amber across the thick carpet. And suddenly I was aware that at the bend of the great staircase, not twenty feet distant from me, stood a shadowy outline in the gloom.

I saw its crouching form straighten suddenly and begin to climb. I could hear its fingers scrape along the banister, and the tread of its feet on the heavy carpet. And it went up—not down toward the lower hall and the library, but up toward the vague unlighted corridor that led to the locked laboratory in the abandoned bowels of the house.

I would have followed. I stepped into the hall and closed the door behind me, and moved forward very slowly. Then, out of the gloom a hand came to hold me back, and a voice, Drake's voice, whispered with significant softness: "No, Lovell! No!"

I swung about sharply. The detective stood behind me, with a finger to his lips. He drew me along the corridor and stood motionless again, listening. Far above us I heard the shf-shf-shf of dragging feet.

"Mallory, going up to his den," Drake muttered. "Come. I want you."

I went with him to the staircase and down to the lower hall. There, as he paced ahead of me beneath a single light at the entrance to the library, I saw his face in detail. It was white, set, stiff as wood. It was not Drake's face at all, but a mask in which fear and resolution were fighting for mastery.

He stopped before he pushed open the library door. Pressing against it, he called out softly. It seemed foolish, then, but then I did not know the reason for it.

The door opened, and Forsythe was waiting there. His face, too, was colorless. He gripped Drake's arm and said thickly: "He's—coming?"

"He's gone to the laboratory," Drake warned in a low voice. "We haven't much time!"

He pushed Forsythe forward. The room was in semidarkness, illuminated only by the upright reading lamp by the fireplace. Forsythe paced to the chair there and slumped in it. He picked up a book and glanced at us nervously.

"All right?" he said.

"No. Turn the chair a bit. That's it." Drake's gaze was darting quickly, methodically about the room, taking in every indistinct detail. "We want your back to the door, man! And don't turn."

"I—I won't," Forsythe promised huskily, with an obvious effort.

He slumped down with his book. Drake swung me about and dragged me roughly along the wall to a curtained alcove, where he thrust aside the hanging and motioned me to get out of sight. For a moment he continued to look around him; then he crossed to the door, closed it noiselessly, and returned to my side.

"Get where you can see," he ordered curtly. "You've a gun?"

I shook my head. He frowned and pressed an automatic revolver into my hand.

"Don't lose your head, Lovell," he cautioned savagely. "Keep your nerve. Watch the door, and don't use your gun until I use mine. And then don't miss!"

"But—"

"Sh-h," he whispered. "Not a sound. Wait."

And so I waited. An eternity went by, it seemed to me, while I crouched there with my fingers knotted in the curtain and my shoulder flat-pressed against the side of the alcove. I could see the entire room. There was Forsythe sitting like a mummy before the fireplace, swathed in the diffused yellow glow of the lamp. There was the table beside him, and the vacant chair in which Anne Forsythe had died. And row upon row of somber lifeless volumes, merging into restive gloom. And the closed door.

I waited, and there was no sound. There was nothing—nothing but the thumping of my own heart and the occasional twitch of the man beside me. And my finger began to grow stiff and sore in the trigger guard of my gun, and began to ache fiendishly.

Half an hour must have passed at least. Half an hour in which

my nerves became tighter and more vibrant, until they were on the verge of cracking completely. I wanted to laugh wildly and violently, and to fling myself forward, and to scream to high heaven.

And then it came. Drake's hand clenched abruptly on my wrist, holding me motionless. A warning whisper came from his lips. His arm stretched past my face, pointing with a long gnarled finger to the door.

I looked, and went suddenly rigid. There was no mistake. The knob was turning before my eyes—turning slowly, deliberately to the left. Then it stopped. A dull click, soft enough to be audible only in my imagination, reverberated across the room. And the door began to open, and continued to open, and slid wide.

What happened then is a nightmare. I stood transfixed, frozen, with my eyes wide open and fixed on the aperture. I heard nothing. Nothing at all. But I saw.

There on the threshold was a shapeless bluish haze, moving within itself, swirling slowly as it advanced. As I stared, it took definite form and became a pair of ghoulish naked feet—hairy, satanic feet which clung to the floor and twisted upwards into stumps of malformed legs. They moved forward, one after the other, into the room—misty, macabre outlines of horror. And they progressed with mechanical precision, one-two, one-two, one-two, straight toward the back of Jean Forsythe's chair.

They were almost upon him when my nerves snapped at last. I lunged forward, screaming hideously, tearing the curtain as I went. I reeled into the open, and stumbled, and fell sprawling. And the revolver in my fist belched again and again, spewing fire from its mouth, vomiting bullets into the ceiling above me.

I saw the hands then. They materialized from nowhere and took form with frightful swiftness. Horrible bluish-black hands, huge beyond belief, hovering over Forsythe's head. Then they struck, lunging downward with the speed of a striking serpent. Forsythe's body writhed with terrible agony, twisting backward convulsively, even as he tried to escape. His own hands went up to his throat, letting the book clatter to the floor. He wrenched at the uncanny talons that were throttling him. They jerked him

into mid-air, and a sobbing, choking cry came mewling from his mouth.

I struggled to my feet. The very sight of the man's helpless terror was enough to drive any cowardly fear from my own heart. I should have reached his side and attempted to do battle with the ghastly creature which had him in its death hold.

I say that I intended to do this. But before I had taken two steps, a blinding spurt of flame seared across the room before me. It was Drake's revolver, roaring at last. The whole room shuddered to those grinding explosions, as the gun bellowed its challenge.

The hairy hands released their hold. Forsythe, with his arms flailing the air, staggered grotesquely backward, just in time. The huge paws thrashed forward. Savagely they whirled about, rushing over me and past me. A sudden stench of unspeakably foul air rushed into my face as the thing hurtled by; and the hairy feet were so close that I might have reached out to snatch them. Then beyond me in the mouth of the alcove Drake was fighting wildly, hand to hand, with that invisible, hellishly powerful nothing.

Somehow I went to his assistance. I swung my gun, hammering with it, slashing with it. I gulped great mouthfuls of that awful stench, and tore frantically, madly, at the horrible hairy creature in my grip.

How it ended I do not know. Sharp teeth buried themselves in my shoulder and I went down in a wave of blackness. I heard Drake's revolver roaring very close above me, almost in my face. There was a sickening hiss of breath, a whimpering snarl, and a great weight slumped across my legs, pinning me to the floor.

After that I was delirious. Drake pulled me out and stood me up. Forsythe was standing beside me, staring down and trembling like a leaf.

"Good God," he whispered violently, "what is it? What. . . ."

But then a merciful darkness swooped down and left me unconscious.

Later, I was lying on a great leather divan in the guest room.

Drake was beside me, bending over me. Forsythe, very white and nervous, sat facing me.

"I still don't understand," he was saying thickly. "You say that"

Drake stood up. "Wait here. I'll show you," he said. He left the room, and when he returned a few moments later he held in his hand a little gray box. He passed it quietly to Forsythe.

"Perhaps, if you read this," he suggested.

Forsythe removed the cover with clumsy fingers. I watched him intently as he took out the little phial of liquid, now empty. He stared at it. Then, unsteadily, he unfolded the bit of paper.

He read it aloud, in a strained voice:

"To be taken, as usual, before retiring. As a strict warning I must caution you again against experimenting with these endocrines, as you have stated several times in your recent boastful letters. Such experimentation as you describe will very likely have the result of increasing the strength of the endocrines beyond measure, in which case they are likely to affect your mental as well as physical condition. These endocrines are prepared, as you know, from the glands of the anthropoid ape, and an overdose may have fatal results. The preparation will reach you, as before, every ten days during my stay in Libreville.

F. Reigmann."

Forsythe folded the paper slowly and looked at us.

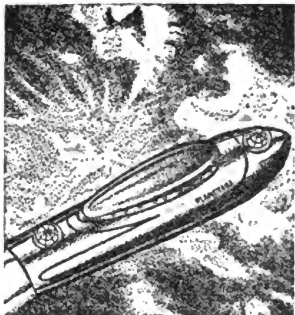
"Do you mean—this is a medicine?" he demanded.

"Medicine?" I muttered. "Any medicine that comes at regular intervals from such a man as Reigmann is more likely a drug. Mallory was evidently under this surgeon's care. The drug was perhaps necessary for his life."

"And he experimented with the drug after he received it!"

"He did," Drake said simply. "When Mallory entered the library tonight, he came straight from his laboratory, where he'd been monkeying with these endocrines. He was a fanatic. He

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ignored Reigmann's warning and continued to experiment with the preparation in his own way. Even boasted about it. You know the result."

"But I don't understand."

Forsythe left his mumbling unfinished. I knew what he was thinking. So did Drake. Mark Mallory, in his childish desire to experiment, had made a horror of Reigmann's medicine. The petty resentments in his heart, toward Anne Forsythe and Jean, had become diabolical hates, possessing him beyond all power of reason. But there was something else, far more terrible. What endocrines, or what ductless gland preparations known to medicine, could ever give a human being that power of becoming invisible at will? That frightful power of *supernaturalism*? For Mark Mallory lay dead on the floor of the library, even now, in a state of semi-invisibility; and those parts of him which possessed shape and form were not human, but anthropoid!

"I don't know," Drake said stiffly. "I—well, I don't go in for such things. Reigmann will have to answer."

And Reigmann did answer. Twenty-four hours later a cablegram arrived for Mark Mallory—a significant terrible message, explaining what might better have been forever left a mystery:

"Libreville, French Congo. On pain of death do not take the endocrines last sent to you. They were prepared from the glands of a vicious drill ape which was no real ape but a horrible were-ape of supernatural power. Four hours after death the monster regained life in its original form of a Bakenzenzi witch-doctor of evil reputation as a black magician and murderer. Swore horrible vengeance. For God's sake destroy the endocrines at once.

Reigmann."

THE VAULTS OF YOH-VOMBIS

by Clark Ashton Smith

(author of *The Return of the Sorcerer*)

CLARK ASHTON SMITH (1893-1961) had had a number of stories published in Hugo Gernsback's *WONDER STORIES* and *WONDER STORIES QUARTERLY* before this tale appeared in *WEIRD TALES*, and it is not impossible that it may have been written with science fiction magazine publication in mind. If so, perhaps Mr. Gernsback did not find it quite "scientific" enough, even if it does take place on Mars. Not only this tale but *all* the Mars and Venus stories that were so plentiful in those days must be placed into the never-never-land category, though some may be a little closer to the facts of the planet now coming our way via probes than others. In any event, this is a chilling fantasy, but it may be possible that it was sent to *WONDER STORIES*, and declined therefrom for reasons which will become apparent to you upon reading it. They do not greatly harm the story, however. Of course, the truth might be that Smith wrote the tale and sent it directly to *WEIRD TALES*, for Editor Wright was very fond of science fiction which had sufficient "weirdness" as he saw it for his pages.

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IF THE DOCTORS ARE CORRECT in their prognostication, I have only a few Martian hours of life remaining to me. In those hours I shall endeavor to relate, as a warning to others who might follow in our footsteps, the singular and frightful happenings that terminated our researches among the ruins of Yoh-Vombis. If my story will only serve to prevent future explorations, the telling will not have been in vain.

There were eight of us, professional archeologists with more or less terrene and interplanetary experience, who set forth native guides from Ignarh, the commercial metropolis of Mars, to inspect that ancient, eon-deserted city. Allan Octave, our official leader, held his primacy by knowing more about Martian archeology than any other Terrestrial on the planet; and others of the party, such as William Harper and Jonas Halgren, had been

associated with him in many of his previous researches. I, Rodney Severn, was more of a newcomer, having spent but a few months on Mars; and the greater part of my own ultra-terrene delvings had been confined to Venus.

The nude, spongy-chested Aihais had spoken deterringly of vast deserts filled with ever-swirling sandstorms, through which we must pass to reach Yoh-Vombis; and in spite of our munificent offers of payment, it had been difficult to secure guides for the journey. Therefore we were surprised as well as pleased when we came to the ruins after seven hours of plodding across the flat, treeless, orange-yellow desolation to the southwest of Ignarh.

We beheld our destination, for the first time, in the setting of the small, remote sun. For a little, we thought that the domeless, three-angled towers and broken-down monoliths were those of some unlegended city, other than the one we sought. But the disposition of the ruins, which lay in a sort of arc for almost the entire extent of a low, gneissic, league-long elevation of bare, eroded stone, together with the type of architecture, soon convinced us that we had found our goal. No other ancient city on Mars had been laid out in that manner; and the strange, many-terraced buttresses, like the stairways of forgotten Anakim, were peculiar to the prehistoric race that had built Yoh-Vombis.

I have seen the hoary, sky-confronting walls of Machu Pichu amid the desolate Andes; and the frozen, giant-built battlements of Uogam on the glacial tundras of the nightward hemisphere of Venus. But these were as things of yesteryear compared to the walls upon which we gazed. The whole region was far from the life-giving canals beyond whose environs even the more noxious flora and fauna are seldom found; and we had seen no living thing since our departure from Ignarh. But here, in this place of petrified sterility, of eternal bareness and solitude, it seemed that life could never have been.

I think we all received the same impression as we stood staring in silence while the pale sunset fell on the dark and megalithic ruins. I remember gasping a little, in an air that seemed to have been touched by the irrespirable chill of death; and I heard the

same sharp, laborious intake of breath from others of our party.

"That place is deader than an Egyptian morgue," observed Harper.

Certainly it is far more ancient," Octave assented. "According to the most reliable legends, the Yorhis, who built Yoh-Vombis, were wiped out by the present ruling race at least forty thousand years ago."

"There's a story, isn't there," said Harper, "that the last remnant of the Yorhis was destroyed by some unknown agency—something too horrible and outre to be mentioned even in a myth?"

"Of course, I've heard that legend," agreed Octave. "Maybe we'll find evidence among the ruins to prove or disprove it. The Yorhis may have been cleaned out by some terrible epidemic, such as the Yashta pestilence, which was a kind of green mold that ate all the bones of the body, starting with the teeth. But we needn't be afraid of getting it, if there are any mummies in Yoh-Vombis—the bacteria will all be dead as their victims, after so many cycles of planetary desiccation."

The sun had gone down with uncanny swiftness, as if it had disappeared through some sort of prestidigitation rather than the normal process of setting. We felt the instant chill of the blue-green twilight; and the ether above us was like a huge, transparent dome of sunless ice, shot with a million bleak sparklings that were the stars. We donned the coats and helmets of Martian fur, which must always be worn at night; and going on to westward of the walls, we established our camp in their lee, so that we might be sheltered a little from the *jaar*, that cruel desert wind that always blows from the east before dawn. Then, lighting the alcohol lamps that had been brought along for cooking purposes, we huddled around them while the evening meal was prepared and eaten.

Afterward, for comfort rather than because of weariness, we retired early to our sleeping-bags; and the two Aihais, our guides, wrapped themselves in the cerement-like folds of *bassa*-cloth which are all the protection their leathery skins appear to require even in sub-zero temperatures.

Even in my thick, double-lined bag, I still felt the rigor of the night air; and I am sure it was this, rather than anything else, which kept me awake for a long while and rendered my eventual slumber somewhat restless and broken. At any rate, I was not troubled by even the least presentiment of alarm or danger; and I should have laughed at the idea that anything of peril could lurk in Yoh-Vombis, amid whose undreamable and stupefying antiquities the very phantoms of its dead must long since have faded into nothingness.

I must have drowsed again and again, with starts of semi-wakefulness. At last, in one of these, I knew vaguely that the small twin moons, Phobos and Deimos, had risen and were making huge and far-flung shadows with the domeless towers; shadows that almost touched the glimmering, shrouded forms of my companions.

The whole scene was locked in a petrific stillness; and none of the sleepers stirred. Then, as my lids were about to close, I received an impression of movement in the frozen gloom; and it seemed to me that a portion of the foremost shadow had detached itself and was crawling toward Octave, who lay nearer to the ruins than we others.

Even through my heavy lethargy, I was disturbed by a warning of something unnatural and perhaps ominous. I started to sit up; and even as I moved, the shadowy object, whatever it was, drew back and became merged once more in the greater shadow. Its vanishment startled me into full wakefulness; and yet I could not be sure that I had actually seen the thing. In that brief, final glimpse, it had seemed like a roughly circular piece of cloth or leather, dark and crumpled, and twelve or fourteen inches in diameter, that ran along the ground with the doubling movement of an inch-worm, causing it to fold and unfold in a startling manner as it went.

I did not go to sleep again for nearly an hour; and if it had not been for the extreme cold, I should doubtless have gotten up to investigate and make sure whether I had really beheld an object of such bizarre nature or had merely dreamt it. But more and more I began to convince myself that the thing was too unlikely

and fantastical to have been anything but the figment of a dream. And at last I nodded off into light slumber.

The chill, demoniac sighing of the *jaar* across the jagged walls awoke me, and I saw that the faint moonlight had received the hueless accession of early dawn. We all arose, and prepared our breakfast with fingers that grew numb in spite of the spirit-lamps.

My queer visual experience during the night had taken on more than ever a fantasmagoric unreality; and I gave it no more than a passing thought and did not speak of it to the others. We were all eager to begin our explorations; and shortly after sunrise we started on a preliminary tour of examination.

Strangely, as it seemed, the two Martians refused to accompany us. Stolid and taciturn, they gave no explicit reason; but evidently nothing would induce them to enter Yoh-Vombis. Whether or not they were afraid of the ruins, we were unable to determine: their enigmatic faces, with the small oblique eyes and huge, flaring nostrils, betrayed neither fear nor any other emotion intelligible to man. In reply to our questions, they merely said that no Aihai had set foot among the ruins for ages. Apparently there was some mysterious taboo in connection with the place.

For equipment in that preliminary tour we took along only our electric torches and a crowbar. Our other tools, and some cartridges of high explosives, we left at our camp, to be used later if necessary, after we had surveyed the ground. One or two of us owned automatics; but these also were left behind; for it seemed absurd to imagine that any form of life would be encountered among the ruins.

Octave was visibly excited as we began our inspection, and maintained a running fire of exclamatory comment. The rest of us were subdued and silent; it was impossible to shake off the somber awe and wonder that fell upon us from those megalithic stones.

We went on for some distance among the triangular, terraced buildings, following the zigzag streets that conformed to this peculiar architecture. Most of the towers were more or less dilapidated; and everywhere we saw the deep erosion wrought by

cycles of blowing wind and sand, which, in many cases, had worn into roundness the sharp angles of the mighty walls. We entered some of the towers, but found utter emptiness within. Whatever they had contained in the way of furnishings must long ago have crumbled into dust; and the dust had been blown away by the searching desert gales.

At length we came to the wall of a vast terrace, hewn from the plateau itself. On this terrace, the central buildings were grouped like a sort of acropolis. A flight of time-eaten steps, designed for longer limbs than those of men or even the gangling modern Martians, afforded access to the hewn summit.

Pausing, we decided to defer our investigation of the higher buildings, which, being more exposed than the others, were doubly ruinous and dilapidated, and in all likelihood would offer little for our trouble. Octave had begun to voice his disappointment over our failure to find anything in the nature of artifacts or carvings that would throw light on the history of Yoh-Vombis.

Then, a little to the right of the stairway, we perceived an entrance in the main wall, half choked with ancient debris. Behind the heap of detritus, we found the beginning of a downward flight of steps. Darkness poured from the opening, noisome and musty with primordial stagnancies of decay; and we could see nothing below the first steps, which gave the appearance of being suspended over a black gulf.

Throwing his torch-beam into the abyss, Octave began to descend the stairs. His eager voice called us to follow.

At the bottom of the high, awkward steps, we found ourselves in a long and roomy vault, like a subterranean hallway. Its floor was deep with siftings of immemorial dust. The air was singularly heavy, as if the lees of an ancient atmosphere, less tenuous than that of Mars today, had settled down and remained in that stagnant darkness. It was harder to breathe than the outer air: it was filled with unknown effluvia; and the light dust arose before us at every step, diffusing a faintness of bygone corruption, like the dust of powdered mummies.

At the end of the vault, before a strait and lofty doorway, our

torches revealed an immense shallow urn or pan, supported on short cube-shaped legs, and wrought from a dull, blackish-green material. In its bottom, we perceived a deposit of dark and cinder-like fragments, which gave off a slight but disagreeable pungence, like the phantom of some more powerful odor. Octave, bending over the rim, began to cough and sneeze as he inhaled it.

"That stuff, whatever it was, must have been a pretty strong fumigant," he observed. "The people of Yoh-Vombis may have used it to disinfect the vaults."

The doorway beyond the shallow urn admitted us to a larger chamber, whose floor was comparatively free of dust. We found that the dark stone beneath our feet was marked off in multiform geometric patterns, traced with ochreous ore, amid which, as in Egyptian cartouches, hieroglyphics and highly formalized drawings were enclosed. We could make little from most of them; but the figures in many were doubtless designed to represent the Yorhis themselves. Like the Aihais, they were tall and angular, with great, bellows-like chests. The ears and nostrils, as far as we could judge, were not so huge and flaring as those of the modern Martians. All of these Yorhis were depicted as being nude; but in one of the cartouches, done in a far hastier style than the others, we perceived two figures whose high, conical craniums were wrapped in what seemed to be a sort of turban, which they were about to remove or adjust. The artist seemed to have laid a peculiar emphasis on the odd gesture with which the sinuous, four-jointed fingers were plucking at these head-dresses; and the whole posture was unexplainably contorted.

From the second vault, passages ramified in all directions, leading to a veritable warren of catacombs. Here, enormous pot-bellied urns of the same material as the fumigating-pan, but taller than a man's head and fitted with angular-handled stoppers, were ranged in solemn rows along the walls, leaving scant room for two of us to walk abreast. When we succeeded in removing one of the huge stoppers, we saw that the jar was filled to the rim with ashes and charred fragments of bone. Doubtless (as is still the

Martian custom) the Yorhis had stored the cremated remains of whole families in single urns.

Even Octave became silent as we went on; and a sort of meditative awe seemed to replace his former excitement. We others, I think, were utterly weighed down to a man by the solid gloom of a concept-defying antiquity, into which it seemed that we were going farther and farther at every step.

The shadows fluttered before us like the monstrous and misshapen wings of phantom bats. There was nothing anywhere but the atom-like dust of ages, and the jars that held the ashes of a long-extinct people. But, clinging to the high roof in one of the farther vaults, I saw a dark and corrugated patch of circular form, like a withered fungus. It was impossible to reach the thing; and we went on after peering at it with many futile conjectures. Oddly enough, I failed to remember at that moment the crumpled, shadowy object I had seen or dreamt of the night before.

I have no idea how far we had gone, when we came to the last vault; but it seemed that we had been wandering for ages in that forgotten underworld. The air was growing fouler and more irrespirable, with a thick, sodden quality, as if from a sediment of material rottenness; and we had about decided to turn back. Then, without warning, at the end of a long, urn-lined catacomb, we found ourselves confronted by a blank wall.

Here we came upon one of the strangest and most mystifying of our discoveries—a mummified and incredibly desiccated figure, standing erect against the wall. It was more than seven feet in height, of a brown, bituminous color, and was wholly nude except for a sort of black cowl that covered the upper head and drooped down at the sides in wrinkled folds. From the size and general contour, it was plainly one of the ancient Yorhis—perhaps the sole member of this race whose body had remained intact.

We all felt an inexpressible thrill at the sheer age of this shrivelled thing, which, in the dry air of the vault, had endured through all the historic and geologic vicissitudes of the planet, to provide a visible link with lost cycles.

Then, as we peered closer with our torches, we saw *why* the

mummy had maintained an upright position. At ankles, knees, waist, shoulders and neck it was shackled to the wall by heavy metal bands, so deeply eaten and embrowned with a sort of rust that we had failed to distinguish them at first sight in the shadow. The strange cowl on the head, when closelier studied, continued to baffle us. It was covered with a fine, mold-like pile, unclean and dusty as ancient cobwebs. Something about it, I know not what, was abhorrent and revolting.

"By Jove! this is a real find!" ejaculated Octave, as he thrust his torch into the mummified face, where shadows moved like living things in the pit-deep hollows of the eyes and the huge triple nostrils and wide ears that flared upward beneath the cowl.

Still lifting the torch, he put out his free hand and touched the body very lightly. Tentative as the touch had been, the lower part of the barrel-like torso, the legs, the hands and forearms all seemed to dissolve into powder, leaving the head and upper body and arms still hanging in their metal fetters. The progress of decay had been queerly unequal, for the remnant portions gave no sign of disintegration.

Octave cried out in dismay, and then began to cough and sneeze, as the cloud of brown powder, floating with airy lightness, enveloped him. We others all stepped back to avoid the powder. Then, above the spreading cloud, I saw an unbelievable thing. The black cowl on the mummy's head began to curl and twitch upward at the corners, it writhed with a verminous motion, it fell from the withered cranium, seeming to fold and unfold convulsively in midair as it fell. Then it dropped on the bare head of Octave who, in his disconcertment at the crumbling of the mummy, had remained standing close to the wall. At that instant, in a start of profound terror, I remembered the thing that had inched itself from the shadows of Yoh-Vombis in the light of the twin moons, and had drawn back like a figment of slumber at my first waking movement.

Cleaving closely as a tightened cloth, the thing enfolded Octave's hair and brow and eyes, and he shrieked wildly, with incoherent pleas for help, and tore with frantic fingers at the cowl, but failed to loosen it. Then his cries began to mount in a

mad crescendo of agony, as if beneath some instrument of infernal torture; and he danced and capered blindly about the vault, eluding us with strange celerity as we all sprang forward in an effort to reach him and release him from his weird incumbrance. The whole happening was mysterious as a nightmare; but the thing that had fallen on his head was plainly some unclassified form of Martian life, which, contrary to all the known laws of science, had survived in those primordial catacombs. We must rescue him from its clutches if we could.

We tried to close in on the frenzied figure of our chief—which, in the far from roomy space between the last urns and the wall, should have been an easy matter. But, darting away, in a manner doubly incomprehensible because of his blindfolded condition, he circled about us and ran past, to disappear among the urns toward the outer labyrinth of intersecting catacombs.

"My God! What has happened to him?" cried Harper. "The man acts as if he were possessed."

There was obviously no time for a discussion of the enigma, and we all followed Octave as speedily as our astonishment would permit. We had lost sight of him in the darkness; and when we came to the first division of the vaults, we were doubtful as to which passage he had taken, till we heard a shrill scream, several times repeated, in a catacomb on the extreme left. There was a shrill, unearthly quality in those screams, which may have been due to the long-stagnant air or the peculiar acoustics of the ramifying caverns. But somehow I could not imagine them as issuing from human lips—at least not from those of a living man. They seemed to contain a soulless, mechanical agony, as if they had been wrung from a devil-driven corpse.

Thrusting our torches before us into the lurching, fleeing shadows, we raced along between rows of mighty urns. The screaming had died away in sepulchral silence; but far off we heard the light and muffled thud of running feet. We followed in headlong pursuit; but, gasping painfully in the vitiated, miasmal air, we were soon compelled to slacken our pace without coming in sight of Octave. Very faintly, and farther away than ever, like the tomb-swallowed steps of a phantom, we heard his vanishing

footfalls. Then they ceased; and we heard nothing, except our own convulsive breathing, and the blood that throbbed in our temple-veins like steadily beaten drums of alarm.

We went on, dividing our party into three contingents when we came to a triple branching of the caverns. Harper and Halgren and I took the middle passage, and after we had gone on for an endless interval without finding any trace of Octave, and had threaded our way through recesses piled to the roof with colossal urns that must have held the ashes of a hundred generations, we came out in the huge chamber with the geometric floor-designs. Here, very shortly, we were joined by the others, who had likewise failed to locate our missing leader.

It would be useless to detail our renewed and hour-long search of the myriad vaults, many of which we had not hitherto explored. All were empty, as far as any sign of life was concerned. I remember passing once more through the vault in which I had seen the dark, rounded patch on the ceiling, and noting with a shudder that the patch was gone. It was a miracle that we did not lose ourselves in that underworld maze; but at last we came back again to the final catacomb, in which we had found the shackled mummy.

We heard a measured and recurrent clangor as we neared the place—a most alarming and mystifying sound under the circumstances. It was like the hammering of ghouls on some forgotten mausoleum. When we drew nearer, the beams of our torches revealed a sight that was no less unexplainable than unexpected. A human figure, with its back toward us and the head concealed by a swollen black object that had the size and form of a sofa cushion, was standing near the remains of the mummy and was striking at the wall with a pointed metal bar. How long Octave had been there, and where he had found the bar, we could not know. But the blank wall had crumbled away beneath his furious blows, leaving on the floor a pile of comet-like fragments; and a small, narrow door, of the same ambiguous material as the cinerary urns and the fumigating-pan, had been laid bare.

Amazed, uncertain, inexpressibly bewildered, we were all incapable of action or volition at that moment. The whole business was too fantastic and too horrifying, and it was plain that Octave had been overcome by some sort of madness. I, for one, felt the violent upsurge of sudden nausea when I had identified the loathsomely bloated thing that clung to Octave's head and drooped in obscene tumescence on his neck. I did not dare to surmise the causation of its bloating.

Before any of us could recover our faculties, Octave flung aside the metal bar and began to fumble for something in the wall. It must have been a hidden spring; though how he could have known its location or existence is beyond all legitimate conjecture. With a dull, hideous grating, the uncovered door swung inward, thick and ponderous as a mausolean slab, leaving an aperture from which the nether midnight seemed to well like a flood of eon-buried foulness. Somehow, at that instant, our electric torches appeared to flicker and grow dim; and we all breathed a suffocating feter, like draft from inner worlds of immemorial putrescence.

Octave had turned toward us now, and he stood in an idle posture before the open door, like one who has finished some ordained task. I was the first of our party to throw off the paralyzing spell; and pulling out a clasp-knife—the only semblance of a weapon which I carried—I ran over to him. He moved back, but not quickly enough to evade me, when I stabbed with the four-inch blade at the black, turgescient mass, that enveloped his whole upper head and hung down upon his eyes.

What the thing was, I should prefer not to imagine—if it were possible to imagine. It was formless as a great slug, with neither head nor tail nor apparent organs—an unclean, puffy, leathery, thing, covered with that fine, mold-like fur of which I have spoken. The knife tore into it as if through rotten parchment, making a long gash, and the horror appeared to collapse like a broken bladder. Out of it there gushed a sickening torrent of human blood, mingled with dark, filiated masses that may have been half-dissolved hair, and floating gelatinous lumps like

molten bone, and shreds of a curdy white substance. At the same time, Octave began to stagger, and went down at full length on the floor. Disturbed by his fall, the mummy-dust arose about him in a curling cloud, beneath which he lay mortally still.

Conquering my revulsion, and choking with the dust, I bent over him and tore the flaccid, oozing horror from his head. It came with unexpected ease, as if I had removed a limp rag; but I wish to God that I had let it remain. Beneath, there was no longer a human cranium, for all had been eaten away, even to the eye-brows, and the half-devoured brain was laid bare as I lifted the cowl-like object. I dropped the unnamable thing from fingers that had grown suddenly nerveless, and it turned over as it fell, revealing on the nether side many rows of pinkish suckers, arranged in circles about a pallid disk that was covered with nerve-like filaments, suggesting a sort of plexus.

My companions had pressed forward behind me; but, for an appreciable interval, no one spoke.

"How long do you suppose he has been dead?" It was Halgren who whispered the awful question, which we had all been asking ourselves. Apparently no one felt able or willing to answer it; and we could only stare in horrible, timeless fascination at Octave.

At length I made an effort to avert my gaze; and turning at random, I saw the remnants of the shackled mummy, and noted for the first time, with mechanical, unreal horror, the half-eaten condition of the withered head. From this, my gaze was diverted to the newly opened door at one side, without perceiving for a moment what had drawn my attention. Then, startled, I beheld beneath my torch, far down beyond the door, as if in some nether pit, a seething, multitudinous, worm-like movement of crawling shadows. They seemed to boil up in the darkness; and then, over the broad threshold of the vault, there poured the verminous vanguard of a countless army; things that were kindred to the monstrous, diabolic leech I had torn from Octave's eaten head. Some were thin and flat, like writhing, doubling disks of cloth or leather, and others were more or less poddy, and crawled with gluttoned slowness. What they had found

to feed on in the sealed, eternal midnight I do not know; and I pray that I never shall know.

I sprang back and away from them, electrified with terror, sick with loathing, and the black army inched itself unendingly with nightmare swiftness from the unsealed abyss, like the nauseous vomit of horror-stated hells. As it poured toward us, burying Octave's body from sight in a writhing wave, I saw a stir of life from the seemingly dead thing I had cast aside, and saw the loathly struggle which it made to right itself and join the others.

But neither I nor my companions could endure to look longer. We turned and ran between the mighty rows of urns, with the slithering mass of demon leeches close upon us, and scattered in blind panic when we came to the first division of the vaults. Heedless of each other or of anything but the urgency of flight, we plunged into the ramifying passages at random. Behind me, I heard some one stumble and go down, with a curse that mounted to an insane shrieking; but I knew that if I halted and went back, it would be only to invite the same baleful doom that had overtaken the hindmost of our party.

Still clutching the electric torch and my open clasp-knife, I ran along a minor passage which, I seemed to remember, would conduct with more or less directness upon the large outer vault with the painted floor. Here I found myself alone. The others had kept to the main catacombs; and I heard far off a muffled babel of mad cries, as if several of them had been seized by their pursuers.

It seemed that I must have been mistaken about the direction of the passage; for it turned and twisted in an unfamiliar manner, with many intersections; and I soon found that I was lost in the black labyrinth, where the dust had lain unstirred by living feet for inestimable generations. The cinerary warren had grown still once more; and I heard my own frenzied panting, loud and stertorous as that of a Titan in the dead silence.

Suddenly, as I went on, my torch disclosed a human figure coming toward me in the gloom. Before I could master my startlement, the figure had passed me with long, machine-like strides, as if returning to the inner vaults. I think it was Harper.

since the height and build were about right for him; but I am not altogether sure, for the eyes and upper head were muffled by a dark, inflated cowl, and the pale lips were locked as if in a silence of tetanic torture—or death. Whoever he was, he had dropped his torch; and he was running blindfold, in utter darkness, beneath the impulsion of that unearthly vampirism, to seek the very fountain-head of the unloosed horror. I knew that he was beyond human help; and I did not even dream of trying to stop him.

Trembling violently, I resumed my flight, and was passed by two more of our party, stalking by with mechanical swiftness and sureness, and cowed with those Satanic leeches. The others must have returned by way of the main passages; for I did not meet them; and I was never to see them again.

The remainder of my flight is a blur of pandemonian terror. Once more, after thinking that I was near the outer cavern, I found myself astray, and fled through a ranged eternity of monstrous urns, in vaults that must have extended for an unknown distance beyond our explorations. It seemed that I had gone on for years; and my lungs were choking with the eon-dead air, and my legs were ready to crumble beneath me, when I saw far off a tiny point of blessed daylight. I ran toward it, with all the terrors of the alien darkness crowding behind me, and accursed shadows fluttering before, and saw that the vault ended in a low, ruinous entrance, littered by rubble on which there fell an arc of thin sunshine.

It was another entrance than the one by which we had penetrated this lethal underworld. I was within a dozen feet of the opening when, without sound or other intimation, something dropped upon my head from the roof above, blinding me instantly and closing upon me like a tautened net. My brow and scalp, at the same time, were shot through with a million needle-like pangs—a manifold, evergrowing agony that seemed to pierce the very bone and converge from all sides upon my inmost brain.

The terror and suffering of that moment were worse than aught which the hells of earthly madness of delirium could ever

contain. I felt the foul, vampiric clutch of an atrocious death—and of more than death.

I believe that I dropped the torch; but the fingers of my right hand had still retained the open knife. Instinctively—since I was hardly capable of conscious volition—I raised the knife and slashed blindly, again and again, many times, at the thing that had fastened its deadly folds upon me. The blade must have gone through and through the clinging monstrosity, to gash my own flesh in a score of places; but I did not feel the pain of those wounds in the million-throbbing torment that possessed me.

At last I saw light, and saw that a black strip, loosened from above my eyes and dripping with my own blood, was hanging down my cheek. It writhed a little, even as it hung, and I ripped it away, and ripped the other remnants of the thing, tatter by oozing, bloody tatter, from off my brow and head. Then I staggered toward the entrance; and the wan light turned to a far, receding, dancing flame before me as I lurched and fell outside the cavern—a flame that fled like the last star of creation above the yawning, sliding chaos and oblivion into which I descended . . .

I am told that my unconsciousness was of brief duration. I came to myself with the cryptic faces of the two Martian guides bending over me. My head was full of lancinating pains, and half-remembered terrors closed upon my mind like the shadows of mustering harpies. I rolled over, and looked back toward the cavern-mouth, from which the Martians, after finding me, had seemingly dragged me for some little distance. The mouth was under the terraced angle of an outer building, and within sight of our camp.

I stared at the black opening with hideous fascination, and descried a shadowy stirring in the gloom—the writhing, verminous movement of things that pressed forward from the darkness but did not emerge into the light. Doubtless they could not endure the sun, those creatures of ultramundane night and cycle-sealed corruption.

It was then that the ultimate horror, the beginning madness, came upon me. Amid my crawling, revulsion, my

nausea-prompted desire to flee from that seething cavern-mouth, there rose an abhorrently conflicting impulse to return; to thread my backward way through all the catacombs, as the others had done; to go down where never men save they, the inconceivably doomed and accursed, had ever gone; to seek beneath that damnable compulsion a nether world that human thought can never picture. There was a black light, a soundless calling, in the vaults of my brain: the implanted summons of the Thing, like a permeating and sorcerous poison. It lured me to the subterranean door that was walled up by the dying people of Yoh-Vombis, to immure those hellish and immortal leeches, those dark parasites that engraft their own abominable life on the half-eaten brains of the dead. It called me to the depths beyond, where dwell the noisome, necromantic Ones, of whom the leeches, with all their powers of vampirism and diabolism, are but the merest minions . . .

It was only the two Aihais who prevented me from going back. I struggled, I fought them insanely as they strove to retard me with their spongy arms; but I must have been pretty thoroughly exhausted from all the superhuman adventures of the day; and I went down once more, after a little, into fathomless nothingness, from which I floated out at long intervals, to realize that I was being carried across the desert toward Ignarh.

Well, that is all my story. I have tried to tell it fully and coherently, at a cost that would be unimaginable to the sane . . . to tell it before the madness falls upon me again, as it will very soon—as it is doing now . . . Yes, I have told my story . . . and you have written it all out, haven't you? Now I must go back to Yoh-Vombis—back across the desert and down through all the catacombs to the vaster vaults beneath. Something is in my brain, that commands me and will direct me . . . I tell you, I must go . . .

POSTSCRIPT

As an intern in the territorial hospital at Ignarh, I had charge of the singular case of Rodney Severn, the one surviving member

of the Octave Expedition to Yoh-Vombis, and took down the above story from his dictation. Severn had been brought to the hospital by the Martian guides of the Expedition. He was suffering from a horribly lacerated and inflamed condition of the scalp and brow, and was wildly delirious part of the time and had to be held down in his bed during recurrent seizures of a mania whose violence was doubly inexplicable in view of his extreme debility.

The lacerations, as will have been learned from the story, were mainly self-inflicted. They were mingled with numerous small round wounds, easily distinguished from the knife-slashes, and arranged in regular circles, through which an unknown poison had been injected into Severn's scalp. The causation of these wounds was difficult to explain; unless one were to believe that Severn's story was true, and was no mere figment of his illness. Speaking for myself, in the light of what afterward occurred, I feel that I have no other resource than to believe it. There are strange things on the red planet; and I can only second the wish that was expressed by the doomed archeologist in regard to future explorations.

The night after he had finished telling me his story, while another doctor than myself was supposedly on duty, Severn managed to escape from the hospital, doubtless in one of the strange seizures at which I have hinted: a most astonishing thing, for he had seemed weaker than ever after the long strain of his terrible narrative, and his demise had been hourly expected. More astonishing still, his bare footsteps were found in the desert, going toward Yoh-Vombis, till they vanished in the path of a light sandstorm; but no trace of Severn himself has yet been discovered.

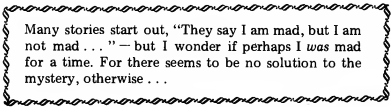
laura

by Joseph H. Bloom

THE FACT THAT I AM PERMITTED by my doctors here at the hospital access to the quill pen that I now hold in my hand, is, I recognize, a small but significant indication of my progress. Only three weeks ago, when I was first brought to this place, I had to be confined (for my own safety as well as the safety of others) to a straitjacket. Now I have hope of effecting a total recovery.

The onset of the illness that forced my hospitalization was exceedingly acute, the proximate cause quite obvious. Now that my bruised and tortured mind has reverted to something akin to its former state, I feel that it may be of value — therapeutic for myself, enlightening for my doctors — to try to set down in the greatest possible detail, no matter how laborious or time-consuming the task, the events of those two dark and terrible days that led to my illness. It is to this end, therefore, that I commence the following narrative.

There was, I felt, something strange about the house even before I set foot in it. What small plot of ground existed between it and the sandy side lane on which it stood was choked by a forest of rhododendrons, each half



Many stories start out, "They say I am mad, but I am not mad . . ." — but I wonder if perhaps I *was* mad for a time. For there seems to be no solution to the mystery, otherwise . . .

again as tall as myself. So closely packed together were the aged plants with their gnarled and tortuous limbs, that the leathery green leaves all but hid the house from view. I followed the uneven flagstone path to the front door, rang, and waited.

What brought me to that dismal abode I do not exactly know. I suppose one could say that it was the note that I had received in the mail and which now lay in my jacket pocket, but that would be only partially true. One hardly scurries off to some strange address on the other side of the city merely because the morning's mail brings a pencilled missive that says: "Come." To be entirely honest, however, I should explain that the note said more than that.

While waiting for my ring to be answered, I withdrew the folded piece of paper from its resting place and read it once again:

"Dear Friend:

I must see you. It is terribly urgent. I cannot explain here. Please come at once.

L.

P.S.: I have your brown leather driving gloves."

The envelope had been correctly addressed and delivered, yet I had not the vaguest notion who L. was, nor did I recognize the return address. Still I found I could not ignore the summons. There was something compelling about it. And the reference to the driving gloves! I had only to read that postscript once and I recalled, some four or five years earlier, having lost a fine pair of soft brown leather driving gloves which I had purchased at no little expense in a small shop in Vienna. Surely L. was some long-forgotten acquaintance of my past who had found the driving gloves.

My mind was wandering down the narrow cobblestoned streets of Vienna when the door before me swung inward. Behind it appeared almost total darkness. I could see no one. Cautiously, I thrust my head into the opening and called a quiet "Hello."

"Please come in." The voice was that of a woman, rather husky in tone, and it seemed to beckon to me from a point directly ahead. I stared into the pitch and, after some effort to adjust my eyes to the darkness, was able to make out what appeared to be a seated figure.

"Who . . . who is there?" I asked, suddenly no longer sure that I had done the right thing in coming.

"It is I, Laura. Please come in. You're letting in a draught."

Still beset with uncertainty, but under the influence of a strong curiosity to see the thing through, I stepped across the threshold. A dim yellow light from a room off the right of the vestibule now showed itself, and by it, I could make out the speaker. She was, I guessed, in her late 50's, perhaps early 60's. I could not call her attractive, nor was she plain; her face somehow mixed the two in equal proportions, leaving a countenance that one was not likely to remember for any particular feature. Her hair, now streaked with white, had once been of a uniform dark color — whether brown or black it was not possible to tell standing there. She bade me close the heavy paneled door, and I obeyed, stiffening momentarily at the sound of the brass lock snapping shut.

"It was good of you to come. I knew you would." I could now see that she was seated in a high-backed wicker wheelchair, a velvet robe covering her lap and legs. She turned the chair to her left and rolled into the room from whence emitted the only apparent light in the entire house. "In here, please," she directed as she passed from the vestibule through the plaster archway. I shrugged, thrust my hands nervously into the pockets of my jacket, and followed.

The room was a cavernous library, topped by an overhanging balcony, around which ran a railing of intricately carved woodwork. On the upper level, floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, heavy with ornately bound volumes, lined every available inch of wall space. A deep-set fireplace stood against the west wall in the room proper, a smoked-glass mirror over the mantelpiece.

"Please be seated," she said, motioning toward a harp-backed chair covered in tan pongee. We were now separated by a small round table. "May I offer you a glass of sherry?"

"No. I mean yes, thank you," I stammered, unaccustomed to partaking of spirits so early in the day yet fearful of offending my hostess. She extricated the stopper from the neck of the cut-glass decanter and poured out two glasses of wine. "You received my note?"

Her query caught me in mid-swallow and I all but choked in my haste to reply. "Yes, I did. I must admit, however, that I was rather puzzled by it. I could not for the life of me recall who 'L.' might be, nor did I recognize your address on the envelope."

"Then what made you come?"

"I . . . I am not quite sure," I admitted. "I asked myself that very question on the way over. I suppose it was the urgency of your message."

That and the reference to the driving gloves." The corners of her mouth betrayed a faint smile of triumph. "I had quite forgotten about them until your note arrived. Still I was puzzled."

"And now that you are here?" She sipped at her sherry, staring at me over the rim of the glass.

"Frankly, I find myself still somewhat up in the air. I can't say that I can recall our previous meeting."

"That is because we have never met before." The admission caught me unprepared and caused me a cold wave of discomfort.

"Then how . . ."

"... did I know about the gloves? Do you have my note?" I nodded. "May I have it please?" She took it and maneuvered her wheelchair over to a ponderous mahogany secretary. "That is how," she said returning, handing me a yellowed sheet of newsprint.

My advertisement in the Lost and Found Column of the *Post*! So long ago had I placed it that I had completely forgotten about it. The flag at the top of the page recorded the actual date. "But that was over five years ago," I said. "Supposing . . ."

"... that the gloves had been found and returned?"

"Precisely."

"Then you might have chosen to ignore my message."

"But I don't understand. What is it that you want that you have gone to such lengths to have me come here?"

"Money."

Her frankness was terribly disquieting. "Money?"

"Yes."

"But why should I give you money? I do not even know you. You have said so yourself."

She signaled a pause in the conversation and poured herself more wine; I waved her off when she offered to refill my glass. I wanted to stay in full possession of all my faculties. The bizarre events that were beginning to unfold themselves before me demanded total sobriety.

"My husband," she continued after draining her glass of more than half of its viscous amber liquid, "my former husband, deserted me shortly after we were married. The same fate had befallen my mother and her mother before her. Unfortunately, I foolishly failed to heed their warnings about that most detestable of all creatures: men. I was left broken-hearted and penniless. Soon after, I became an invalid. I have managed to exist over the years by calling upon my faithless husband's fellowmen to support me."

I experienced a compelling urge to rise and run from the house, but the absurdity of what she was saying left me temporarily paralyzed.

"That is insane. Why should I — or any other stranger for that matter, be forced to assume a responsibility that is clearly not his?"

"Because you, as was my disloyal spouse, are a member of the male race."

"That is ridiculous! I won't stand for blackmail. I do regret your misfortunes, but I fail to see what part I play in them. I am a busy man and have wasted considerable time on what has turned out to be a fool's errand. I shall be leaving now."

"I don't believe so. You see, I am afraid I am going to have to kill you." I blinked in disbelief. From beneath her lap robe she withdrew a snub-nosed revolver and aimed it directly at my heart. "Unless, of course, you reconsider my request."

"You can't get away with this. You're mad. The sound of the shot will be heard, and . . ."

The last thing I anticipated at that juncture was laughter. Yet laugh is precisely what the woman called Laura did. It was, to be frank, more of a crowing sound than a true laugh. "My dear man, do not be so naive. Do you not think I have planned better than that? I shan't use this weapon unless you force me to, and then, if questioned, I will tell the authorities that it was in self defense. That you intended to rob me. You see, I may be a cripple, but I am not a fool." She emptied her glass. "Allow me to show you something. If you will be so kind as to step back into the vestibule."

"But . . ."

" . . . remembering all the while that I am holding this weapon."

I obeyed as anyone with the slightest vestige of good sense will recognize I was obliged to do, and thus found myself once more standing in the dimly lit entranceway. She followed me, propelling her chair with one hand while continuing to aim the revolver with the other.

"Good. Now if you turn about, you will find a door. Please open it." She smiled wanly and waved the revolver toward a door on the rear wall of the vestibule, directly opposite the door through which I had entered the house.

"I'm afraid it's locked."

"Of course. How silly of me." She plunged her free hand beneath the velvet robe and produced a large passkey. "Here." I took it from her and with trembling hand found the keyhole. The latch slid back. "Open the door," she instructed coldly. Slowly, apprehensively, I moved the door ajar. "Wider!" I heard the hammer of the revolver cocked and hastened to do her bidding.

Not in my most terrifying dream had I ever witnessed a more ghastly

scene. I wanted to speak, to cry out, but was struck dumb with terror. "Do you still doubt," she intoned impassionately, "that I will carry out my threat?" I looked from the incredible scene that lay before me, to the speaker, and back. I tried to fathom what I saw.

Behind the door lay a capacious walk-in closet. Around the three walls, at a height of some six to seven feet from the floor, ran a row of sharp-pointed metal hooks of the type seen in butcher shops, and from no fewer than eight of these hooks hung the remains of men! Frozen by my fear, I studied the grim sight that had been revealed to me.

On two hooks to my left there was naught but a human skeleton, the bones clean and white as the purest alabaster, the skulls contorted in a sardonic leer. To my right hung three nude corpses of relatively recent vintage, the flesh taut and sallow, giving the impression of figures seen in a wax museum. Judging from the gaping chest wounds, each had been shot at close range. The body closest to me had additionally been shot through the eyes; there in the dim light of the vestibule I could see the crusted rust-brown rivulets that coursed down over the cheekbones to the jaw line, forming there a sanguinary goatee.

But by far the most terrible part of the entire real-life nightmare were the three bodies that hung against the rear wall. Each was in a state of partial decay with huge chunks of rotting flesh creating a random mottled pattern over the naked forms. Here and there were exposed underlying muscles and bones and the stench emitted made me nauseous. I could see swarms of maggots wriggling in dark patches over the surface of the cadavers. I slammed the door shut, the perspiration pouring down my face.

"You wouldn't. I'll give you the money. Anything. Any amount." I reached for my wallet.

"Of course you will. I knew you were a sensible man." I hastily pulled all the bills from the billfold and dropped them onto her robe. "Thank you. I am most grateful. It has been a pleasure to have you visit me. But," she continued, taking obvious delight in my discomfort, "please do not return. I may not be as hospitable the next time."

My heart was racing so that I was sure she could hear it. "May I go now?"

"Certainly."

A cold autumn rain was falling outside but even that adversity seemed a blessing. I ran from the house to the sandy path and out to the main road without once looking back. When I reached the mainroad I slowed to a trot and then to a fast walk. I was short of breath and could feel the beginnings

of a stabbing pain deep within my breast. But I longed to put a goodly distance between myself and the house before I stopped. What time it was I knew nor cared not. Some several minutes later, I succeeded in hailing a coach and went directly home. My hands were still trembling as I fumbled absentmindedly through my now empty wallet. I bade the coachman wait, raced into my apartment, rifled my desk for some money I had hidden there, returned to the street, and paid him his fare. Upon completing the transaction, I proceeded to my bedroom and fell across the bed, fully clothed, into a fitful sleep. When I awoke, it was close to midnight. I fixed myself a meager supper and began to plot a course of action.

Early the next morning, having reached a decision on what I should do, I presented myself to the Chief Inspector in the Hampton District Office. He was a corpulent man, red cheeks tipped with blotches of white, who smoked a pipe unceasingly. He listened with seeming disinterest to my incredible tale — at least I took his manner for disinterest, for he did not once react in any way — then leaned back in his swivel chair and contemplated the peeling paint of the ceiling overhead. Silver balls of smoke rose from his pipe. “You say, sir, that this took place out near Hampton Park?”

“Yes, Inspector.”

“And, you think you can find the house?”

“I think so.”

“But you no longer have the note of which you spoke?”

“No. She never gave it back to me.”

“I see.” He allowed his chair to tip forward. “And you’re quite sure that you were totally sober at the time?”

“Quite.”

“Very well. I have my doubts, but I feel it is my duty to investigate. Let us be off.”

After considerable searching and backtracking I located the dirt road that led to the house. As we approached, I was sorry I had returned, but it was by then too late. Once again, I made my way through the rhododendron forest and stood at the front door. The Inspector rang the bell.

She was exceedingly tall for a woman, close to six feet I would guess, and rather attractive. Fortyish. She was dressed in a simple cotton housedress, her hair bound up in a kerchief. “Yes, gentlemen?”

The Inspector shot a questioning glance over his shoulder at me, then removed the pipe from his mouth just long enough to introduce us. “This gentleman has related some . . . well, strange occurrences that he alleges took place here.”

"Here? In this house?"

"Yes, mam. So he says. Do you mind if we come in for a moment, Miss . . ."

"Owens. Harriet Owens. No, of course not, please do. Forgive my appearance. I was just tidying up a bit." We entered the vestibule and I was confronted once again with The Door. The Door of Death. "We can talk in the library."

The room was unchanged. The Inspector and Miss Owens took up positions at opposite ends of the sofa. I sat where I had the day before. "Tell me, Miss Owens," the Inspector began, "is there anyone else living here?"

"Why no. I live here alone."

"An older woman. In a wheelchair, perhaps?" he continued.

The woman recoiled slightly. "I just told you. I live here alone. I have since my sister passed on." She seemed rather shaken.

"Is there something wrong, Miss Owens?" the Inspector asked.

"No . . . it's just that . . ."

"What is it?"

"Well, my sister was an invalid during the last years of her life and confined to a wheelchair. But she died five years ago."

"Are you quite sure, Miss Owens?" I blurted out. I was immediately sorry, but it was too late. The words were irretrievable.

"The death of one's sister is hardly something that one is unsure of."

"I'm sorry, Miss Owens. That was uncalled for. My apologies."

"Well, I think we can be going," the Inspector offered, rising from his seat. "Miss Owens has been more than polite in permitting us into her home. I see no reason for further questions."

"But I don't understand," I pleaded.

"Neither do I," snapped the Inspector, an annoyed tone in his voice.

"But wait. Is this not the library as I described it? The balcony. The fireplace there."

The Inspector studied the room. "It is. But there are many houses in this district which are constructed similarly. Thank you again, Miss Owens. We shall be going."

"Certainly, Inspector. I'm sorry I couldn't be of more help."

I was seized by panic. I began to doubt my own sanity. Could I have dreamed the entire incident? Was I mad? Or had I merely picked the wrong house? No, I was sure of the house. I couldn't leave without knowing.

"Wait," I implored. "The closet. See for yourself." I sprang from my

chair to the door in the vestibule and yanked at the glass knob. "It's locked."

"Why, yes, I always keep that door locked. It . . . it was one of my sister's last requests. I know it sounds foolish, but that's the way Laura was."

The Inspector's eyebrows shot upward. "Laura? Did you say Laura?"

"Yes. That was my sister's name."

"Miss Owens, this may seem highly irregular, but would you kindly unlock that door."

"But . . ."

"Please Miss Owens. I prefer to avoid any unpleasantness. I could return with a warrant."

"Very well." She stepped to the desk — the same one from which the woman called Laura had, the day before, taken the page of newspaper in which appeared my advertisement — and returned with a single key. It was the same key! I stood back as the Inspector fumbled with the lock. Suddenly, I realized I could not bear to see that odious site again.

"No. Don't." I grabbed at the Inspector's arm. "Don't open the door. Please."

The Inspector wrenched himself free. "My good man, if you don't mind. I must ask you to allow me to complete my investigation." I slumped into a heap at his feet, sobbing uncontrollably at my behavior and in stark terror at what was about to be revealed. I heard the door open and squeezed my eyes shut tight.

The voice seemed to come from afar off. As if in a dream. Had I indeed been asleep? Then I recognized it. It was the Inspector. "Would you please look here." I said a short prayer and opened my eyes.

"NO! No! It can't be. It can't be." But it was. Instead of the ghoulis collection of mortal remains, I was faced with nothing more terrifying than a closet filled with women's clothes. "God. It can't be."

"I am sorry to have put you to all this trouble, Miss Owens. Good day."

"Good day, Inspector."

The Inspector was civil enough to drop me at a tavern near my apartment, although the ride there was made in an icy, awkward silence. It was the morning of the following day before I returned home.

The mail lay piled before my door. Mechanically, I gathered it up and went straight to my study where I lit a roaring blaze to dispel the chill. The mail contained a statement from my bank, some circulars, and a large parcel wrapped in brown paper. I broke the string on the parcel and tore off the

The Vicar of Hell

by Edward D. Hoch

(author of *Sword for a Sinner*, *The Man from Nowhere*, etc.)

CONSIDERING THE FACT THAT, during his lifetime, Sir Francis Bryan was one of the most notorious men in the British Isles, it is unusual that he should have become one of the forgotten men of history, overlooked by virtually every modern encyclopedia and textbook.

Since my business is publishing, it was this fact, more than any other, that took me to England that winter on a strange quest. And before my long search was ended I was to find my very life threatened by a murder that took place over four hundred years ago . . .

The first thing I heard, as I left the big four-motored plane at London airport, was a small portable radio playing one of Gershwin's old tunes, *A Foggy Day*. It was indeed a foggy day in London town, and for a time there'd been some doubt about our ability to land the plane. They told me such fog was common in London during the winter months, and I guess that was supposed to settle any complaints I might have voiced.

A copy of *The Worship of Satan*, by Sir Francis Bryan, known as "the Vicar of Hell," would be immensely valuable. And in the search for it, I met Simon Ark once again.

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DETECTIVE STORIES, August; by permission
of Edward D. Hoch.

While the Simon Ark stories by EDWARD D. HOCH remain controversial, in that we always get extreme reactions of like and dislike when we present one of them, the majority of you, the active readers who let us know how you feel, have indicated that you would like to see them now and then. The first story that Mr. Hoch sold was *Village of the Dead*, which came to me when I was editing *FAMOUS DETECTIVE STORIES*, all unheralded, one day in 1955. Mr. Hoch did not remain an exclusive author for one magazine, however, and it was not too long when he was appearing in all of the better ones; and when the magazine which gave Simon Ark his first home was forced to discontinue the series, through circumstances which had nothing to do with their merit, Simon Ark moved to *THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE*, another title now, alas, departed.

There were two distinct Simon Ark series, which cannot be fitted together; it is from the first of the two that we have selected some of the eerier tales.

Actually, it had just turned December by the calendar, but in a city like London, where the annual mean temperature was only around 51 degrees, anything past the middle of November could be considered winter.

Had I been planning a sight-seeing visit to the tightly sprawling city on the Thames, I'm sure I'd have picked a better month than December. But this was a business trip; and though the whole thing had been my idea in the first place, I hadn't much choice over the time of the year.

And so there I was, in London in the middle of a mild fog, bound for a meeting with a girl bearing the unusual name of Rain Richards.

I'd first seen the name at the bottom of a letter sent to our London office, and forwarded to me in New York. Since I was a married man approaching the age of forty, I had not even considered the fact that Miss Rain Richards might be young and beautiful and intelligent. But she was all three of these – and much more besides – as I realized the moment she'd opened the thick oak door of her house in the London suburbs.

She was tall and slim, with the stature of a fashion model, and yet there was something about her that hinted at a darkness beneath the surface. "I've been expecting you," she said after I'd introduced myself. "Please come in."

She led me down a narrow, dusky hall into a large room that might have been a study. Three walls were hung with a variety of small arms – guns, revolvers and automatics of all types. I judged there to be close to a hundred of them in the collection.

"Yours?" I motioned toward the walls, never dreaming that they were.

"Yes," she surprised me by saying. "Shooting is a hobby with me."

"Interesting. Now, about this matter, Miss Richards . . ."

"You can call me Rain."

"That really is your name? I could hardly believe it when I saw the letter."

"I was born in India during the monsoon," she said, by way of explanation. "I guess my folks had a sense of humor or something."

From the looks of her, I would have guessed her age to be about twenty-seven, but it was hard to tell. I might have been five years off in either direction. She lit a cigaret as she talked, and casually blew smoke out her nostrils. "But you don't want to hear about me, of course. You've come about my letter."

"That's correct. You were quite right in saying that we'd be interested in this book you mention. Suppose you tell me a little more about it."

She relaxed deep into the chair and began to talk, with a soft toneless voice that flowed through the room like a glistening stream.

"You've heard of Sir Francis Bryan? Good! Very few people have, you know. I myself first became interested in Bryan while I was at your Columbia University. One day I came across a line in Milton which refers to him as the 'Vicar of Hell', and that started me searching. It was a hard, long job, because most modern historians seem to have completely forgotten Bryan. But I finally found a few facts."

She paused long enough to take another draw on her cigaret, and then continued. "Bryan lived during the first half of the Sixteenth Century, and he was a friend and advisor to Henry VIII. He was also a cousin of Anne Boleyn, and when she was put on trial, which resulted in her execution in 1536, he deserted her in order to remain in Henry's good graces. This deed caused Thomas Cromwell to refer to him in a letter as 'the Vicar of Hell', a name that stuck with him until his death — though some historians credit Henry with first calling him that."

"But what about this unsolved murder you mentioned in your letter?" I asked her.

"Oh yes. Well, in 1548, James Butler — an Irishman and the Ninth Earl of Ormonde — was poisoned while visiting here in London. Because they feared that his widow might marry an enemy of the crown, and thus strengthen his land-holdings, certain highly-placed persons persuaded Francis Bryan, himself a widower, to woo and marry her — for the good of the country. Bryan succeeded in this last duty for his country, and he moved to Ireland to take over his new lands. However, he lived only two years, and died mysteriously in 1550."

"So you have two mysterious deaths on your hands — James Butler and Bryan himself."

"Yes," she continued, in an earnest voice that he was beginning to like. "Now my researches have turned up further information, unknown thus far to any of the historians. Sometime during the 17th Century, about a hundred years after these deaths, there was published a large volume which claimed to give a somewhat shocking solution to these deaths. The book was immediately suppressed by the government, and all copies were seized and destroyed."

"Then what makes you think you can turn up a copy, three hundred years later?"

She rose from the chair and began striding back and forth across the room, her long legs moving quickly beneath the tight folds of her skirt. "Two weeks ago I received a letter from a man who'd heard of my quest. He offered to obtain a copy of the suppressed book for ten thousand pounds."

I relaxed and felt for my own American cigarettes. "So that's why you contacted a book publisher. You expect us to put up . . . What? Around \$30,000? Put up around \$30,000 for a book that might not even exist!"

"No; I simply want you to go with me to see this man. He refused even to see me unless I brought someone along who could offer that kind of money. Actually, ten thousand pounds isn't very much for a book that may have been written by another Boswell."

I sighed, and puffed on the cigaret. "I suppose not," I admitted. "At least it's worth talking to this fellow." Actually since I'd crossed the ocean on this mission already, I had no intention of going back empty-handed. But there was no reason for letting Rain Richards know that — at least not yet.

"Good," she said; "let me call him."

She placed a call to a number in the Kensington Gardens section of London, "At least that's where he told me he was located," and waited until a man's voice answered. "Hello? Mister Hugo Carrier? This is Rain Richards. I have an interested party over from the States. Can we get together sometime tonight? Oh . . . well, how about first thing in the morning? Fine . . . Let me jot down the address . . . Good, we'll see you around ten in the morning."

She hung up and turned back to me. "He can't see us until ten in the morning. Will that be all right with you?"

"Guess it'll have to be. I'll stop by here for you around nine-thirty."

"Fine," she replied, the hint of a smile lingering on her face. "Till then . . ."

I left her in the doorway and walked back toward my hotel. With the coming of night, the fog seemed even thicker, but I found Waterloo Bridge after nearly an hour of walking and hailed a cab for the remaining distance.

Back in my hotel room, I found myself preoccupied with the memory of the girl named Rain. I took out a book and started to read, but it didn't help. I found myself comparing her with my wife, Shelly, and presently I took out my wallet and gazed at the photo of Shelly — the one I'd taken at the beach some three years ago.

Finally, unable to settle the troubled thought of my own mind, I climbed into bed and dropped off into a sound sleep . . .

The morning dawned, bright and sunny, with only a slight mist to remind me of the fog of the night before. It was almost like a morning in New York, when the canyons of Manhattan seem like valleys for the flowering river of mist.

Now that I realized just how far Rain lived from the center of London, I took a cab the entire distance. She met me at the door, looking as young and cool as I remembered her. "Come in," she greeted me. "I'm just doing a little shooting downstairs. You may watch, if you like."

I followed her to the basement, where I found a sandbagged area, with targets on the far wall, that apparently served as her shooting gallery. On a shelf in front of her were a number of hand guns, and I recognized a U.S. Army .45 and .25 pocket automatic, and several foreign pistols.

"This is my favorite," she said, choosing a tiny weapon from the shelf. "A .41 caliber Derringer. Watch!"

She brought the gun up to eye level with a single sweeping motion that my eye could hardly follow. There was a deafening roar as both of its twin barrels spouted flame, and I could see the bull's eye of one of the targets fly away at the bullets' impact.

"You're quite a shot."

"I had to be. I was in Burma when the Japanese invaded. They killed my folks."

"I'm sorry . . ."

"I'm over it now," she said. "I'm back in jolly old England, where everybody's respectable; and the war seems a long ways back. I suppose I'm lucky that my family had money back here, so I can devote myself to foolish projects like searching for lost manuscripts, and such."

As she spoke, she traded the Derringer for a tiny Colt .25 automatic and let go with five quick shots at another target. We walked over to examine it together. Four of the bullets had circled the bull's eye; the fifth was off to one side.

"That should have been in the center," she complained. "Well, what say we go to see Mister Carrier? It's nearly ten now."

I agreed and she put away the guns. "Have to clean them later — that's one part of it I don't like. Here, I'll take the Derringer with me; never can tell when it'll come in handy."

She reloaded and dropped it into her purse and I raised my eyebrows lightly. "Do you have a permit for that?"

"The bobbies don't carry guns around here. Somebody has to have one, or there's no telling what would happen."

I shrugged and followed her out. The trip to Hugo Carrier's tiny flat on the other side of London was made in a swift little MG with Rain at the wheel. It was my first ride in one of them, but it seemed to handle well under her command.

Presently we came to a halt before a run-down block of apartments off Bayswater Road. "This is the address he gave me; he's on the second floor."

We climbed the shadowy stairs to the first landing, and in the dim light of a single naked bulb read the names on the doors. "Here it is," I said. "Hugo Carrier."

I knocked at the door and waited, but no one came. I knocked again.

"It's only five minutes after ten," Rain said. "He must be here."

"Maybe he's still asleep." I tried the knob of the door, more as a reflex action than for any other reason. It swung open at my touch, and in that instant I already knew what we would find inside.

But I was unprepared for the horror that met our eyes. For there, pinned to the opposite wall of the room, was the body of a man. His arms were spread in a cross, and the hands pinned to the wall with long arrows through each palm. A third arrow protruded from the man's chest.

Behind me, Rain Richards screamed . . .

2

THE ROOM SEEMED FILLED with the quiet men from Scotland Yard, popping their flashbulbs and dusting for fingerprints. We told our story for the tenth time to the inspector, who seemed to be in charge.

"You hadn't previously met this man, Miss Richards?" he wanted to know.

"No," she shook her head. "I'd only talked to him on the phone."

"And have you any knowledge of this mark on the floor?" He was pointing to something that Rain and I had missed in the first shock of our discovery. It was a sort of pentagram, in a circle, drawn in red on the floor in front of Carrier's body. There was no doubt that the design had been drawn with the dead man's blood . . .

They took us down to the yards for further questioning, but they seemed to be getting nowhere. Presently we were introduced to still another questioner, an Inspector Ashly.

As soon as I heard the name, something clicked in my mind, like the tumblers of a safe. "Ashly! Inspector Ashly!" I exclaimed. "Simon Ark told me about you once."

Ashly's face became alert at the mention of that name. "You know Simon Ark?"

"Very well; I met him years ago back in the States. He told me of the odd happening at Devonshire a few years back."

Ashly was interested now. "I sometimes thought it was all a bad dream; I doubted, somehow, that the man ever really existed. It's certainly a relief to talk to someone else who knows him."

Ashly was a short man with a deep, booming voice, and I well remembered Simon Ark's tale of their adventures together in the snows of Devonshire. He was much as Simon had described him, and in that moment I knew that the odd murder of Hugo Carrier was another case that called for Simon's special talents.

"But did you know that Simon Ark was in England?" I asked him.

"No! Where is he?"

"I have no idea, but he left New York over a month ago. If we could find him, I'm sure he could help us on this case."

Inspector Ashly frowned. "He's not a detective, though. And there hardly seem to be any supernatural elements in this case . . ."

"I wouldn't be too sure," I replied. "You've probably heard that a pentagram was drawn in blood on the floor of the room. Isn't that an old symbol of witchcraft and satanism?"

Ashly struck the table with his fist. "I believe you're right. And if so, we can build up a newspaper story that's sure to attract Simon Ark if he's anywhere around."

After that, we left the buildings of New Scotland Yard, and walked through the chill December air toward Westminster Abbey. Whitehall was buzzing with midday activity, and before we'd gone two blocks there was already a newsboy shouting about the "weird murder in Kensington".

We walked on, aimlessly, until at last Rain asked, "Who is this Simon Ark you both seemed to know, anyway? Is he a detective?"

"No," I replied, searching for the right words to explain the fantastic story. "He's perhaps the wisest man in the world, a man with a past that may date back to the beginning of the Christian era. He's been searching the

world for a long time, perhaps for centuries, in hopes of meeting the devil in combat."

"But . . . Are you trying to kid me? Is he some sort of crazy man, or what?"

A double-decked bus rumbled by us, and we turned west on Victoria Street. Behind us, Big Ben was just tolling the hour of one o'clock.

"Whatever he is, he's not crazy," I told her. "Actually, the Comte de Saint-Germain claimed to have lived for four thousand years, and it's possible that he did. And the German physician, Paracelsus, is once supposed to have fought bodily with Satan. Certainly Simon Ark's story is no more fantastic than theirs."

"But who is he? Where did he come from?"

"That's something nobody knows. My own guess is that he was once a Coptic priest, back in the early centuries after Christ; but he never says much about it. He told me once, though, that he knew Saint Augustine, personally — which would make him well over 1500 years old."

Rain laughed at that and gripped my arm with hers. "I was beginning to think you were serious, but you're just having some fun with me."

"Believe me, I *am* serious."

"Well, then you'll have to show me this man and let me judge for myself. I saw many unusual things in India, but never a man who claimed to be over 1500 years old."

A breeze somewhat cooler than the rest hit us then, and she pushed closer to me. "Let's get inside somewhere, out of this confounded cold air."

"What we should be doing is trying to find that book Carrier had for us," I told her. "If the book was the cause of his murder, it must be certainly worth having."

She was excited now, with the hint of intrigue in the air. "You mean that you really think there might be a connection between the book and his murder?"

"It's certainly possible: we should have searched the place for it."

"Oh, the police would have found it if it were there," she replied. "It's a folio, you know. Hardly the thing you hide behind a picture or anything."

"It does seem odd, though, that if all the copies were destroyed three hundred years ago, Carrier should come up with one now. Maybe the whole thing was a swindle of some sort."

"I doubt that," she said. "He seemed only interested in receiving payment for the book."

We'd reached Victoria Station by this time, and we decided to hail a cab for the long trip back to Rain's place, rather than return for the MG. Even

the taxi trip across London was slow at this time of day, and it was nearly two when we reached her house.

"Let me bring in the mail," she said. "Not that there's ever . . ." She paused and ripped open an envelope that had been addressed in a quick, almost illegible scrawl.

"Look!" she exclaimed. "It's from Carrier."

"What? Let me see that!" I took it away from her shaking hands and read: *"I may not be alive tomorrow when you come. If they get me first, I will at least have cheated them of their secret. The book you seek is titled The Worship of Satan, and together with accounts of divers crimes of the 16th and 17th Centuries, it also includes the forbidden rituals of devil worship. The only copy still in existence in London is an ancient dwelling at 65 Crashaw Place, behind the Blue Pig Pub. You will find a room there which was once a priest's hole, during the Elizabethan persecution of the Catholics. The book is in this room, though to insure payment of the agreed sum, I cannot tell you more as to its location. I sincerely hope that my fears will prove groundless. Hugo Carrier."*

She had been reading it over my shoulder, and she said, "What's all this about devil worship? What has that got to do with Sir Francis Bryan?"

"I don't know, Rain; I don't know. I just hope that we succeed in contacting Simon Ark."

"Maybe you were right about this all being some sort of gigantic swindle."

I frowned and shook my head. "He sounds like an educated man, which doesn't mean he might not have been planning a swindle — but the fact of his murder seems to bear out his honesty. In fact, he's one of those men I sort of wish I'd met during his life."

She lit a cigaret and dropped the letter on a table. "Are you sorta glad you met me?"

I raised my eyebrows to look at her, but she'd already gone into the kitchen in search of drinks for us. I ignored the question and said, "We should probably go to this place he mentions and look around. We might be able to turn up the book."

She returned with two tall frosted glasses. "I'm beginning to think it's not worth all the trouble. After all, we might end up with arrows in us, too."

"It's certainly a weird business," I agreed as I sipped my drink. "Say, these are pretty good. What's in them?"

"A secret love potion," she murmured with a grin; "let's have a little music."

"I'm a married man, you know," I told her, trying unsuccessfully to keep it sounding light.

She came to me then, with the radio behind her playing something soft by Mantovani, and the clatter of passing traffic drifting in from the street. And it was as I'd feared it would be since I first met her.

I tried to think about Shelly, and our little house in Westchester; but gradually the memories faded from my brain, and I was just a man of flesh and desire . . .

Later, too long later, as night drifted slowly in from the east, we left the house and started out for the address in Crashaw Place. In the night's already deepening shadows, an occasional bird glided down from above, and it might have been a bat or a gull. I only knew it was a moving, living creature up there in the dark, and maybe I wished I was up there too.

"It's not too far," Rain told me, in a voice that made even a casual remark into a hint of intimacy. "We can follow the river all the way."

The Thames was winding on its never-ending journey to the sea, and as we followed along its banks, the whole of London seemed to sleep, even at this early hour. It was as if we were alone in the city, alone without the cluster of crowds and the rumble of civilization.

I paused a moment to light a cigarette, and it was then I saw two men moving in on us. "Rain!" I shouted. "Look out!"

She whirled quickly and a blow from the first man's blackjack caught her on the shoulder. I hurled myself at him, and we went down in a heap. I tried to see where our second attacker was, but the first one was keeping me busy.

Finally I broke free and grabbed up Rain's hand. "Come on," I managed to shout, dragging her with me down a flight of stone steps that led to the water's edge.

I could feel them behind us as we hurtled down the stairs, and at the bottom step I felt strong fingers of steel tear at my throat. I lost my grip on Rain and went tumbling backwards, the hulking attacker on top of me. I struggled to free myself from those murderous fingers, but already I saw one hand leave my throat and come up with a glistening knife.

"Die, damn you," the raspy voice squeaked, and in that instant I thought I had reached the end of everything. But suddenly a roar split the air and his face seemed to fly apart before me. His dying grip relaxed on my neck, and I saw the little smoking Derringer in Rain's steady hand.

"I didn't want to kill him," she sobbed; "but there was no time for a good shot."

"Don't worry. Where's the other one now?"

"Up there!" She pointed to the top of the steps, where the second assassin stood outlined against the dark sky.

"Duck! He's got a gun!" I pulled her down just as the man fired.

"It's a .45," she told me between gasps. "And my gun is empty."

I glanced fearfully at the dim river a few feet away. "Can you swim?"

"A little, but we'd never make it to the water."

"We'll have to try. Come on." He saw us the instant we made our move, and I saw his gun hand move around for a second shot at us.

Then suddenly he seemed to falter, and for the first time I saw the dim figure in the darkness behind him. The .45 slipped from his hand and clattered to the concrete below; then he followed it, diving over in a graceful arc that thudded his body against the very edge of the bank and then hurled it into the black river.

We stood rooted to the spot, looking up at the dim figure who moved down the steps toward us. And then I recognized the tall, heavy-set features of Simon Ark . . .

3

SIMON! YOU CERTAINLY ARRIVED just in time. How did you ever find us?"

He smiled slightly, as he always did, and replied, "There are ways. I see you already disposed of one of them."

We looked down at the bloody face of the man Rain's bullets had killed. "Luckily for me," I said. "This is Rain Richards, a most unusual girl, and a crack shot with a pistol."

Simon Ark grunted a greeting and bent to examine the body. "Do you think this is connected in any way with the death of Hugo Carrier last night?" he asked us.

"I don't know," I replied, "but Rain received a letter from Carrier this noon. He told us of a pub where something was hidden, and we were on our way there now."

"Hidden," he repeated, suddenly interested. "What is it you seek?"

"A book," I told him. "A book called *The Worship of Satan*, written during the 17th Century, but banned by the government, which destroyed all copies. The book supposedly gives the solution to the 1548 murder of Sir James Butler and the mysterious death two years later of Sir Francis Bryan."

"Sir Francis Bryan," Simon Ark muttered. "The Vicar of Hell . . ."

"You've heard of him," Rain said, sounding surprised.

"I've heard of him . . ."

Simon Ark was the same as when I'd last seen him, back in the States a few months earlier. He still had the mysterious quality about him that sometimes made you wonder at the things he said. In that moment, I felt certain he'd known Francis Bryan personally, somehow in the dark past.

"Your old friend Inspector Ashly is working on the case," I told him.

"I saw his name in the papers; he's a brilliant man. I'll call him now and tell him what happened here. Then we can be on our way to this pub you mentioned."

"You're coming with us?" Rain asked.

"Certainly. *The Worship Of Satan* is a most unusual book. If there is a copy still remaining, I would like to see it."

We had climbed the steps from the river now, and in the distance I could see a police car, apparently called by some alert neighbor, bearing down upon us.

"Simon, do you really think this devil worship business is tied in with Carrier's murder?"

He gazed out across the river, as if looking at something far away which only he could see, and then he answered. "In the year 1100, King William the Second was slain by an arrow in the New Forest. His death was part of a human sacrifice of a cult of devil worshippers. Today they still worship, and kill, in much the same way."

His words sent a chill through me, and I put my arm around Rain's slim shoulders. Then the police joined us, and Simon spoke quickly to them, in that old manner of his which could somehow convince anyone of anything. He wrote a brief message to Chief Inspector Ashly and then we departed.

"I believe this pub should be our first stop," he said. "Do you know the way?"

Rain nodded and led us down a dark alley, away from the river. "I feel better now with you two strong men to protect me," she said.

"I doubt if they'll bother us further," Simon Ark comforted her. "They must have learned from Hugo Carrier that he'd sent you the letter."

A slight mist was beginning to gather in the streets, and I suspected we were in for more fog. "Doesn't the fog ever lift around here?" I mumbled.

"This is the season for it," Simon Ark said. "London has been foggy in December for as long as I can remember. The Fall is the worst time for it."

Presently, we reached Crashaw Place and ahead of us we could make out the weather-beaten sign of the *Blue Pig*. "By Appointment To His Majesty King George V". It was a run-down place that might have looked better thirty years earlier, under George's reign. Now it was badly in need of a

paint job, and I couldn't help thinking that a bit of good old American neon would have pepped up the swaying sign.

Inside, a few obviously regular customers lined the bar, and turned as we entered, in mild expectation of seeing some of their nightly drinking-companions. Rain was the only girl in the place, but none of them seemed to mind. We ordered three beers because that seemed to be the thing everyone was drinking, and carried them to a table.

Presently, when Simon Ark was certain he'd identified a stout, balding gentleman as the owner, he rose and walked over to him. "Pardon me, sir, but I'm a visitor in your country . . ."

"Oh," the stout man said. "Well, we're always happy to entertain foreigners at the *Blue Pig*, sir. My name is George Kerrigan. I'm the owner of this here place."

"Very pleased to meet you, Mr. Kerrigan. I'm Simon Ark, and these are my friends. We've been told that the rear of this building dates back to the 17th Century, and we're very anxious to examine it further."

"Glad to be of service," Kerrigan smiled at us. "Yes, sir, this here's one of the just about only old buildings like it still standing. You know, there was that God-awful fire back in 1666, and it just about burned down the whole damned town." He spoke as if he'd witnessed it personally, with just the right degree of awe.

"We understand," Simon Ark continued, "that you even have a room where Catholic priests hid during the persecutions."

"That we have, sir — or at least them's the stories what goes with the old place. Come on back this way and I'll show you."

We followed him down a musty corridor which led into the rear of the pub. Here, in a house that was obviously much older than the front, he paused to unlock a door and throw it open before us. "Haven't been in here myself in a good many months," he told us. "Wait a minute while I get some candles."

"No electricity?" Rain asked, somewhat startled.

"Not in this room, miss; we never use it, so we never bothered to wire it."

He returned in a moment with a multi-branched candlestick held high, and led us into the room. It was no more, really, than an enclosed space some twenty feet square, without windows, and with only the one door through which we'd entered. An ancient, musty smell hung over the place, suggesting that even the air we were now breathing might have been several hundred years old. The walls were covered with a fantastic blaze of colored wallpaper, which even now was just beginning to fade. The only bit of

furniture in the room was a huge old carved table, some ten feet long, which stood against the opposite wall. Its top had been covered with newspapers, apparently to preserve the finish.

Kerrigan was busy telling us the history of the room, from its priest-hole days through the reigns of various kings and queens, but I noticed that Simon Ark was far more concerned with the ancient table. He brushed aside the dusty newspapers, which I noticed were some four weeks old, and smiled slightly when he came upon a shallow drawer in the table's side. But the smile faded when he found the drawer empty.

I, meanwhile, had strolled over to one of the walls and was trying to decipher some patterns from the faded rainbows of color. But the paper seemed to be designed without any purpose, a weird reminder of 17th Century England.

Simon Ark was on his knees, examining the bottom of the long table now; but if Kerrigan thought this odd, he made no comment. He had trapped Rain in a corner and was continuing his brief history of England. "You know, miss, George III himself once visited this very pub, near the end of his reign. Of course there are those who say he was crazy at the time, but he was certainly a friendly one. My great-grandfather used to tell me about those days when I was very small . . ."

"Pardon me," Simon Ark interrupted, resuming an upright position. "But if this room was once a hiding place for priests, I'm sure it has more than one exit. Suppose you show us the secret way out."

Kerrigan never blinked an eye, but simply led us to one of the room's corners as if he'd intended to show it to us all along. "Here it is," he said, and gave a yank to an almost-invisible metal ring set flush with the floor. A well-oiled trap door rose out of the floor and we peered down into the darkness below.

"It simply leads to the cellar," Kerrigan explained. "I don't even store anything down there any more. Too many rats." He lowered the candles a bit so we could see that the cellar was truly empty.

"Well, thank you very much for the tour," Simon told him. "I think that's about all we wanted to see."

He relocked the room behind us and led the way back to the pub's main room. "Have a beer on me before you go," he told us. "And stop by again some time."

"Thanks," Rain replied. "We will."

Soon afterwards, we departed and headed back through the gathering fog to Rain's house. When we were a safe distance away from the *Blue Pig*, I

asked Simon, "What do you think about it? Any idea where the book might be hidden?"

"I have ideas about many things," he told us; "I even have ideas about the odd-looking stains on that tabletop."

"Stains?" I wondered. "I didn't notice any."

Simon Ark grunted. "In any event, we have much more here than simply the mystery of the Vicar of Hell. Although certainly the death of Carrier suggests that the missing book is involved."

By the time we reached Rain's place, the fog had closed in completely, and visibility was down to some fifty yards. We followed her in, on her invitation to make some coffee, and settled down around the fireplace.

I tossed a couple of logs on, and before long the room was alive with the glow of leaping flames. Simon Ark settled back in his chair, closed his eyes, and began to talk.

"Although most history books merely imply that the one-eyed Sir Francis Bryan earned the title of 'Vicar of Hell' by deserting his cousin, Anne Boleyn, when she needed him most, it seems probably there were further reasons. And in a period when witch cults and black magic were running wild throughout England, perhaps it is not too fantastic to suspect that Bryan himself was involved in one of these cults. Certainly that, more than anything else, would have earned him the odd title."

Rain arrived with the steaming coffee and passed it to us. "But what about the murder of James Butler in 1848? And Bryan's own mysterious death two years later?"

"There are two possible solutions which immediately present themselves. Bryan himself could have poisoned James Butler in order to marry his wife, Joan. Then, when Joan discovered this, she herself killed her husband's murderer."

Rain sipped her coffee and lit a cigaret. "And I suppose you'll say the other possibility is that Joan killed both of her husbands."

Simon Ark smiled and nodded. "I admit that was my thought." And then, half to himself, he added, "I only regret that I never had the honor of meeting the Vicar of Hell . . ."

Rain shot me a glance at that, but I was used to such remarks from Simon's lips. I ignored it and asked instead, "Do you really think this book, *The Worship Of Satan*, has something in it about Bryan?"

"Very possible, or else there would have been no reason for the government to ban it at the time; books on devil worship and the like were quite common. From the size of it, I would say it must also have included several large illustrations."

We talked further on the subject, but presently, as midnight drew near, Simon Ark departed, promising to call us in the morning. "It might be a good idea to get some sleep," he cautioned me. "Tomorrow might be a long day."

"Why?"

"Because there will be a full moon tomorrow night," he said, and then he was gone, into the fog.

I came back into Rain's living room, puzzling over these words. I looked at a calendar and saw that there would indeed be a full moon on the following night. "What do you suppose he meant by that?" Rain asked me.

"I don't know. But let's forget about all that for now." I walked over and sat next to her on the couch.

"Should we forget about your wife back in New York, too?"

I didn't answer her.

Instead, my hand went out and found hers, and I drew her close to me in the flickering light from the fireplace . . .

4

SIMON ARK WAS AT MY HOTEL ROOM before noon on the following morning, and I was surprised to see that Inspector Ashly was with him. "Good morning," I greeted them. "What's up?"

"Everything, from what Simon's been telling me," Ashly said. "You fellows must have had a pretty busy night, shooting up would-be killers and such."

"We're lucky we're even alive," I said; "Simon arrived just in time last night."

"He told me. He also had me check on the two dead men, and I find they both frequented the *Blue Pig* pub."

"That figures," I said, lighting a before-breakfast cigarette. "There's something funny about that place."

Simon Ark chuckled. "The understatement of the year, certainly. If you had been a little more observant, I'm sure you would have come to the same conclusions that I did about the *Blue Pig*, and its mysterious back room."

"And just what are your conclusions?" I asked, aware that he'd already outlined his ideas to Inspector Ashly.

"I'm convinced that a Black Mass, and various other ceremonies of Satanism, are being carried on at the *Blue Pig*, in that very room. And I'm further convinced that there's another meeting of the group being held this evening."

"I'll admit that I suspected something funny, but I think now you're going a little overboard, aren't you, Simon?"

"He's got me convinced," Ashly boomed out in that deep voice which still amazed me. "Wait until you've heard the whole thing."

I settled back and sighed. "O.K., Simon. Go ahead and convince me."

"Well," he began, "the arrow murder of Hugo Carrier hinted at some sort of ritual crime; and, as I already told you, this type of slaying has been used before by devil worshippers. The attack on you and Rain proved that Carrier's murder was caused by his knowledge of the book, *The Worship of Satan*. The people who killed him did so because they feared he would reveal the location of the book. Therefore the book itself, or its location, or both, are dangerous to them."

"All right so far," I admitted. "But why does that make it the *Blue Pig*?"

"First, the men who attacked you were from the *Blue Pig*. Second, Carrier gave that as the location of the book. Third, George Kerrigan lied to us when we visited him last night."

"Lied? About what?"

"He said he never stored things in the cellar, yet the secret trap-door was well oiled. And he said he hadn't been in the room in months, yet the newspapers covering the table were four weeks old."

"So I'll agree he lied. But why does it have to be devil worship? Maybe he just runs a card game in that room."

Simon Ark closed his eyes once more. "Those were bloodstains on the table top," he said very quietly. "It was used as an altar, for animal — perhaps human sacrifices . . ."

The three of us were silent for a moment. It was hard for me to believe that such a thing could happen in Twentieth Century London. And yet I knew, from past experiences with Simon Ark, that there were things happening every day beyond human knowledge. It was sometimes as if a vast alternate world of evil were operating all the time, giving us an occasional glimpse into its horrible scenes.

"But why?" I asked. "Why, of all places, should they choose an ancient pub like the *Blue Pig*?"

"Because it was once a hiding place for priests, a place where actual Mass was celebrated, the next best thing to a church. And because it later became the resting place of the only existing copy of *The Worship Of Satan*."

"Horrible . . ." Inspector Ashly muttered. "Now tell us how you're so certain they'll meet again tonight."

"Many strange things happen when the moon is full. Cults of devil

worshippers do not necessarily, or always, meet at the time of the full moon; but when I noticed that the newspapers covering the table were just four weeks old – dated on the first day of last month's full moon – I guessed this was the time of their previous meeting. Thus, since there is another full moon beginning tonight, I believe we'll find them there again."

Ashly rose to his feet. "My men will be ready to close in whenever you give the word, Simon. I know from the last time we met that your theories are usually correct."

I lit another cigaret and began to think about the breakfast I was missing. "Since when is it against the law to carry on religious rites in a private dwelling?" I asked.

Ashly bristled slightly at my question. "This isn't a religion; and you seem to have forgotten the poor devil they left pinned to the wall with three arrows in him."

"I guess I did for a moment," I admitted, feeling slightly subdued. "So – what's our plan of action?"

"The Inspector and his men will surround the place, early in the evening, and await my signal to move in," Simon Ark explained. "I will be in the basement, under that trap door, and you can join me if you wish."

"I wouldn't miss it," I told him. "If you're going to find Satan himself in that room, I want to be along, too."

Ashly sighed. "I believe you two are crazy to risk discovery like that, but I know better than to try arguing with Simon here."

"It might be best," Simon said, "if you could get a gun from somewhere, though. Could you borrow one from Rain?"

"Sure could."

"Don't let me hear anything about this," Ashly muttered. "In London, even the police have a difficult time getting permission to carry guns."

"Well, you'd better have them tonight," Simon Ark told him. "These people are very close to insanity, all of them; when cornered, they might do anything."

After that, they left me, and then I was alone with my thoughts of the night to come. And my thoughts of Rain and of my own house in Westchester, and of Shelly who waited there for me. For the first time I wondered if I would ever go back to her . . .

THE CAB CARRIED ME through Picadilly Circus, past the neon signs now darkened in the light of day, where Gordon's Gin and Wrigley's Gum

fought each other for the customer's attention. And presently I was back at Rain's place in the suburbs. "Hello, again," she greeted me at the door. "Have a good night's sleep?"

"Fine." I quickly outlined the details of Simon Ark's revelations. "How's chances of borrowing a gun till tomorrow?"

"Sure," she said, leading me to a cabinet. "Which one do you want?"

"I used a .45 in the Military Police. That's the only one I'm sure of, so I'd better take one of those."

She handed me the heavy automatic, together with an empty clip and a box of bullets. I shoved seven of them into the clip and then rammed it into the butt. "Thanks a lot, Rain. I'll have it back in the morning."

"Let me come with you," she said then. "I'll go crazy sitting home here, thinking about it."

"Sorry; that's out of the question. Ashly's even worried with Simon and I on the scene. But I'll call you as soon as it's over."

"Is that a promise?"

"That's a promise." I kissed her lightly on the lips and then went out into the street, the automatic hanging heavy in my topcoat pocket.

I took time out to cable the New York office that I expected to obtain the missing book that evening, and close the deal. Then I went to a middle-class bar in downtown London and spent the rest of the afternoon trying to think about nothing at all.

When I got back to the hotel I found an air mail letter from Shelly awaiting me. I tossed it on the bed without opening it.

I wondered, for just a second, if possibly I was going to the *Blue Pig* that night in some subconscious hope that death would solve my problem for me.

Because now I was convinced that I loved Rain Richards . . .

The basement of the *Blue Pig Pub* was a surprisingly easy place to enter, and it took Simon and me only a few moments to locate the door to the old cellar and place ourselves beneath the trap door.

I took the .45 from my pocket, and jacked a bullet into the chamber; after that we waited.

And waited . . .

Presently, when my wrist watch glowed 11:30, and I had just about given up hope, we heard some movement in the room above. At almost the same instant we caught the sound of people entering through the basement, as we had come.

We took shelter behind some musty packing cases, and watched several

men and a few women entering the room through the trap door. Finally, when the sounds from above told us the ceremony had begun, we resumed our post beneath the door.

Simon Ark edged it up a fraction of an inch, and through the opening I saw a scene I'll never forget. There, behind the long table, stood the white-robed figure of George Kerrigan, his arms outstretched toward the ceiling. On either end of the table burned dozens of long black candles, sending their dancing flames over the kneeling figures of some twenty men and women who nearly filled the small room.

The brightly colored wallpaper had been covered in spots by hanging pictures of basilisks and other mythical monsters, and behind Kerrigan I saw a statue of Jupiter, the ancient god.

"Like the one the pagans erected on Calvary, after Christ's death," Simon Ark whispered. "We are in the midst of evil here."

"What are we waiting for, then?" I asked; "let's go!"

"Be patient. There is still more to be seen."

The kneeling figures above were swaying back and forth now, as if under the influence of some narcotic. And a low murmuring chant was slowly building up among them.

"It's horrible," I said, half to myself.

Simon Ark let the trap door fall into place and he said, very quietly, "Perhaps, though, the evil up there is no greater than the evil in your own heart."

"What?" I muttered. "What do you mean?"

"Who is to say that the sin of adultery is any less serious than the sin of devil worship?" he asked, quietly. "Certainly they are both works of Satan."

"Are you crazy, Simon? Why pick a time like this to give me a lecture on morality?"

"It is as good a time as any, my old friend. I came here searching for the devil, and perhaps I have found him in the least likely of all places — inside of you!"

The chanting from above had grown louder, and it pounded at my eardrums as I listened to Simon's words. "No . . ." I mumbled. "No . . ."

"Leave this woman, and go home to Shelly, before it is too late."

"I . . ."

Suddenly, the chanting above turned to shouting, and there was a rush of movement. I lifted the trap door again and saw a startling sight. "It's Rain! They've got Rain!"

Simon Ark was at my side; and he, too, saw the struggling girl in the grip of two strong men. "She must have sneaked in, and Kerrigan recognized her. The little fool!"

And I saw that the white-robed Kerrigan had already produced his deadly bow and arrow. His right hand was drawing back on the bow string and the trembling arrow was pointing through the flickering stillness at Rain's struggling body.

I waited no longer. While my left hand slammed up on the trap door, my right was already bringing the heavy .45 into firing position.

George Kerrigan half turned toward me, and the look of utter surprise was spreading over his face when my bullet tore into his shoulder.

After that, it was chaos . . .

I came out of it with a bloody nose and a torn sleeve, thanks mostly to the prompt arrival of Inspector Ashly and his men. My bullet had completely shattered Kerrigan's shoulder, and he was unconscious by the time the ambulance arrived. His followers were quickly rounded up and led away, and soon only Simon and Ashly and Rain and I remained in the room.

"That bow and arrow should be enough to convict them of Carrier's murder," Ashly said. "I only hope the newspapers don't get ahold of this devil worship angle, or I fear they'll have you stripped nude and about to be sacrificed on the altar, Miss Richards. These reporters are great at building up a sensational story."

"I'm just happy to be alive," Rain answered. "Right now I don't care what they say about me. When I saw that arrow pointing at my chest, all I could remember was poor Carrier pinned to the wall."

"You owe your life to your friends here," Ashly told her.

"I know. Now I just wish Simon would tell us where the book is hidden so we could all go home."

"That's right, Simon," I agreed. "Where is this elusive copy of *The Worship Of Satan*?"

He sighed, and motioned around the room, now brightly lit by several portable police spotlights. "Right where it's always been, my friends; it should have been obvious to you from the beginning. After all, why was it necessary to kill Carrier to keep him from telling its location? Why didn't they simply move it to a new hiding place?"

"That's right," I agreed. "Why didn't they move it?"

"Because they couldn't; because it was the one part of this room that could not easily be disposed of or transported to another place."

We looked around at the long table, and at the pictures, and at the statue, but we saw nothing.

"Where?" Rain asked simply.

Simon Ark closed his eyes. "During the 17th Century, when a book was banned by a government censor, it was not always burned. If the book was a large one, like a folio, the pages were damasked into wallpaper . . ."

"Wallpaper!"

"Certainly. The text was blotted out by overprinting with a heavy design in bright colors, and it was used for wallpaper. Here," he motioned around the room at the multi-colored walls, "here is the last remaining copy of *The Worship Of Satan*, and with it is the final secret of the Vicar of Hell . . ."

After that, much later, I walked with Rain Richards through the mist of a cold London morning . . . "I'll get the University laboratory to work on that wallpaper right away," she said, "but it'll still be months before the original printing is readable."

"I know," I said, "but somehow it isn't as important as it was a few days ago. Whether Bryan was a murderer himself, or whether he was merely the second victim of his murderous wife, is something that need not concern us, really. The punishment for the crimes has been meted out long ago by a much higher court than ours."

"I suppose so," she agreed reluctantly. "It's only too bad that it had to cause so much trouble and death."

We walked further in silence, and then I said, "You know, it's all over between us . . ."

"Yes, I know . . ."

"Simon Ark talked to me tonight, while we waited in that basement."

"He's quite a man, isn't he?"

"Yes, I suppose he is."

"Remember me to your wife."

"Yes," I said, but we both knew that I never would.

"Goodbye . . ."

"Goodbye, Rain . . ."

I watched her as she walked away into the morning mist. I watched her until she was out of sight and then I went back to my hotel room.

The air mail letter from Shelly was still on the bed; I tore it open, and settled down in a chair to read it . . .



... Something like a man, but green all over, like a body that has lain in the river till it's ready to drop apart, was standing by the bed, holding Rosemary in its arms ...



"I WALTER TAKE THEE ROSEMARY to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse — "

Dr. Bentley's measured, evenly modulated words, echoed by the bridegroom's somewhat tremulous repetitions, sounded through St. Philip's.

"*Eh bien,*" irrepressible at church as elsewhere, Jules de Grandin whispered in my ear, "I feel myself about to weep in concert with the attenuated lady in lavender yonder, Friend Trowbridge. We may hold back the tears at a funeral, for the poor defunct one's troubles are over and done, but at a wedding — *pardieu*, who can prophesy the outcome?"

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"S-s-sh!" I commanded, reinforcing my scandalized frown with a sharp dig of my elbow in his ribs. "Can't you be quiet *anywhere*?"

"Under compulsion, yes," he responded, grinning elfishly at my embarrassment, "but—"

"— and have declared the same by giving and receiving a ring, and by joining hands, I now pronounce that they are man and wife" — Dr. Bentley's announcement concluded the ceremony, and the majestic strains of Mendelssohn's Wedding March drowned out the Frenchman's chatter.

Somewhat later, at the bride's home, de Grandin, pleasantly warmed by several glasses of champagne punch, lifted Rosemary Whitney's white-gloved hand to his lips. "Madame Whitney," he assured her, and his little blue eyes swam with sudden tears, "may the happiness of this night be the smallest part of the happiness which lies in store for you; may you and Monsieur Whitney be always happy as I should have been, had not *le bon Dieu* willed otherwise!"

He was strangely silent on the way home. The propensity to chatter which kept his nimble tongue wagging most of his waking hours seemed to have deserted him entirely. Once or twice he heaved a deep, sentimental sigh; as we prepared for bed he forebore to make his usual complimentary remark about the excellence of my brandy, and even omitted to damn the instigators of the Eighteenth Amendment.

It might have been three o'clock, perhaps a bit later, when the shrewish, insistent scolding of my telephone bell woke me.

"Doctor — Dr. Trowbridge" — the voice across the wire was low and muted, as though smothered beneath a weight of sobs — "can you come over right away? Please! This is Mrs. Winnicott, and — it — it's Rosemary. Doctor, she's home, and — yes, yes," evidently she turned to someone at her elbow, "right away." Once more, to me: "Oh, Doctor, *please* hurry!"

I was out of bed and beginning to dress almost before the sharp click in my ear told me Mrs. Winnicott had hung up, but swift as I was, Jules de Grandin was quicker. The chatter of the bell had roused him, and from the doorway of my room he had heard enough to realize an urgent call had come. While I still fumbled, cursing, at the fastenings of my collar, he passed down the upper hall, fully dressed. With my medicine and instrument kits in readiness he was waiting in the lower passage as I clattered down the stairs.

"It's Rosemary Winnicott — Whitney, I mean," I corrected myself. "Her mother just 'phoned, and though she wasn't specific I gathered something dreadful has happened."

"*Mordie, la petite Madame la Mariee?*" he exclaimed. "Ohe, this is monstrous, my friend! Hurry; make haste!"

Although the reproduction is not of the very best, you can see another representation of the gorgeous creature responsible for the chills in this tale in the 13th (Summer 1969) issue of *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES*, as part of the first half of the chronology of the Jules de Grandin series. *The Bride of Dewer* is the last of the four stories, cover illustrations for which were run there.

SEABURY GRANDIN QUINN is no longer with us, having shed a tired body which, with ever-young spirit he fought valiantly to maintain, December 24th of last year. He was delighted to hear, through noting your comments in *The Cauldron*, and my own in personal letters, that de Grandin and Trowbridge have not become passe, either with oldtimers who had read the stories before, or readers new to the sort of story we publish here. The criticisms did not bother him; he had seen them all before, back in the '30s, when the tales were first run.

In recent months, the number of pleas for more de Grandin has mounted to the point where we can feel sure that you really want them. It is partly because I am so happy to print them that I have taken extra pains to try to discover how you feel about them, running "blank tests" now and then – leaving de Grandin out, in order to see how many would write and ask for more, without my having asked for votes on the question. And I hope to bring some of the many non-series stories by this favorite author to you, in our other magazines. You'll find a long editorial about Mr. Quinn and his career in the Fall (No. 34) issue of *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*, which goes on sale simultaneously with this issue of *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES*. And the next four de Grandin tales we bring you will be the ones for which cover illustrations were reproduced in the concluding installment of the chronology, which appeared in our Spring issue, No. 15.

A round, red sun, precursor of a broiling June day, was slowly creeping over the horizon as we reached the Winnicott house and dashed through the front door without the formality of knocking.

In her pretty pink-and-ivory chamber Rosemary Whitney lay, pale as an image graven out of marble beneath the damask counterpane of the virginal bed she had risen from the previous morning with such sweet day-dreams as young girls know upon their wedding morns. Her eyes were quiet, though not closed, and her lips, blenched as though bereft of every drop of blood, were slightly parted. Once or twice she turned her head upon the pillow, weakly, like a fever patient, and emitted a little, frightened moan. That was all.

Impotent as a mother bird which sees its fledgling helpless before a coiling serpent – and as twitteringly nervous – Mrs. Winnicott stood beside her daughter's bed, holding the little white hands that lay so listlessly on the bedspread, reaching mechanically for the phial of sal volatile which stood upon the night-table, then putting it back unopened.

"What is it? What has happened, if you please?" de Grandin cried, placing the medicine cases on a chair and fairly bounding to the bedside.

"I — I don't know — oh, I don't know!" Mrs. Winnicott wailed, wringing her hands helplessly together. "An hour ago — less, maybe — Walter and Rosemary drove up. Walter seemed stunned — almost as though he had been drugged — when he helped her from the car, and said nothing, just half led, half dragged her to the porch, beat upon the front door a moment, then turned and left her. I couldn't sleep, and had been sitting by the window, watching the sky lighten in the east, so I saw them come. When I reached the front door Walter had gone and my poor baby lay there, like this. She's been the same ever since. I've begged her to tell me — to answer me; but — you can see how she is for yourselves!"

"And Walter made no explanation; didn't even stay to help her up to bed?" I asked incredulously.

"No!"

"The young whelp — the scoundrel!" I gritted through my teeth. "If I could get my hands on him, I'd —"

"*Tiens*, my friend, our hands are excellently well filled right here," de Grandin reminded sharply. "Come, attend *Mademoiselle* — *Madame*, I mean; chastisement of the truant bridegroom may come later, when we are more at leisure."

Quick examination disclosed no physical injury of any kind. Rosemary suffered only from profound shock of some sort, though what the cause might be she was no more able to tell us than had she been a newborn babe. The Frenchman's diagnosis paralleled mine, and before I could do more than indicate my opinion he had flown to the medicine case, extracted a hypodermic syringe and a phial of tincture digitalis, then, prepared an alcohol swab for the patient's arm. With an ease and quickness that bespoke his experience in the field dressing-stations of the war, he drove the needle through the girl's white skin, and the powerful heart-regulant shot home. In a few moments her quick, light breathing became more steady, her piteous moaning less frequent, and the deathly pallor which had disfigured her features gave place to the faint suspicion of a normal color.

"*Bien — tres bon!*" He regarded his handiwork complacently. "In a few moments we shall administer a sedative, *Madame*, and your daughter will sleep. From that time forth it is a matter of nursing. We shall procure a skilled attendant at once."

"Hullo, Trowbridge," greeted a familiar voice on the telephone shortly

after our return from Mrs. Winnicott's "d'ye know a fellow named Whitney – Walter Whitney? Seems to me you were his family's physician – this is Donovan talking, over at City Hospital, you know."

"Yes, I know him," I answered grimly. "What –"

"All right, you'd better come over and get him, then. A policeman picked him up a little while ago, nutty as a store full o' cuckoo clocks. Shortly before sunrise this mornin' he was drivin' his car round and round City Hall – seemed to think the Public Square was some sort o' bloomin' merry-go-round, and if the officer hadn't had more sense than most he'd be decoratin' a cell at some station house now, with a drunk an' disorderly charge against him, instead of bein' here an' keepin' more urgent cases out of a bed in H-3. Come on over and get him like a good fellow, won't you?"

"You mean –"

"I sure do, son. It's not dope an' it isn't booze – the boy's as clean as a ribbon and sound as a hound's tooth, but it's *something*, all right, and I don't mean maybe. I wish you'd come and take him off our hands. This isn't any sanitorium for the idle rich, this is a *bums'* roost, man."

"All right," I promised, turning wearily away. To de Grandin, I announced:

"It seems we'll have to revise our opinion of Walter Whitney. Evidently whatever struck poor little Rosemary hit him, too; he's over in the psychopathic ward of City Hospital, suffering from shock of some sort."

"*Morbleu*, this is tragic, no less!" the little Frenchman exclaimed as we set out to get the stricken bridegroom.

There was no doubt Walter Whitney had suffered an ordeal of some kind. His face was serious, preoccupied, as though he sought to catch the lilt of faint, far-away music, or was trying desperately to recall the rime of a snatch of half-remembered verse. When we addressed him he gave back a non-comprehending, vacant-eyed stare, and if we spoke sharply he repeated our words with slow hesitancy, like a child learning to talk or an adult struggling with the intricacies of some foreign language. Once or twice his eyes brimmed with tears, as tears come sometimes at memory of some long-forgotten sorrow, and once he spoke spontaneously.

"What?" I asked, bending down to catch his mumbled answer.

"The – old tale. It's – true – after – all," he muttered slowly, unbelievably. And when I asked him what he meant he murmured thickly: "God have mercy on us!"

2

FOR TEN LONG DAYS we labored with the bride and bridegroom. Several times a day de Grandin or I called on them, but it was the little Frenchman's indomitable will which dragged them back from the lethargy which succeeded the first onset of their strange malady to something near the normal. It was on the eleventh day, while we were visiting Rosemary, that she broke her semi-trance and spoke connectedly.

"Walter and I stole out the back door to where he'd parked his car in the alley while the guests were making merry in the front part of the house," she began with a sad, reminiscent smile, like an old woman recalling the joys of her vanished youth. "We drove to Bladenstown, where Walter had engaged a suite at the Carteret Inn by wire, and he waited in the garden while I fussed about the rooms.

"I'd slipped out of my going-away dress and put on pajamas and kimono, and had finished creaming my face and brushing my hair when —"

She paused, catching her lower lip between her milk-white teeth, like a little girl afraid of what she may say next.

"Yes, *Madame*," de Grandin prompted softly, his little blue eyes shining. "and then?"

"I heard a footstep on the stairs," she answered, a faint flush mantling her pale cheeks. "I thought it was Walter, and —" Again a little pause, then:

"I switched the lights off quickly and dropped my kimono and slippers as I ran across the room and leaped into the bed. I didn't want him to find me up, you see."

Evidently we were expected to understand, and, though neither of us did, we nodded slowly in concert.

"The steps came up the little hall leading from the stairs to our suite," she went on, "and paused before the door, then went down the hall, a little uncertainly, finally came back, and I could hear someone trying the latch tentatively.

"My heart was beating so it almost shut my breath off, and there was goose-flesh all over me; I felt a sort of feverish-chill inside, but I couldn't help but giggle. Walter was as scared as I. Somehow, one doesn't expect a man to be all cold and trembly in such circumstances, but I knew he was and — and it made me feel happier — more as if we were starting out even, you know.

"Just then the door opened a little, tiny crack, and as it did so, the moon, which had been behind the poplars growing at the lower end of the

garden, sailed up into the sky and flooded the room with light. I held my breath, and put out my arms toward Walter, then — *it came in!*”

Her face went white as chalk as she pronounced the words, and we could see the tiny nodules of horripilation form on her forearms.

“It?” De Grandin wrinkled his brows in puzzlement. “What is it you say, *Madame?*”

“It came in — into the parlor of our suite. There was a little, tittering laugh, like the affected snicker of a wicked, senile man — an old rascal listening to a nasty, scandalous story, and then I saw it. Oh!” she put her thin, pale hands to her face as though to shut away a sight too terrible for memory, and her narrow, silk-sheathed shoulders shook with sobs of revulsion.

“It wasn’t like a man, and yet it was. Not more than four feet tall, very stooped and bandy-legged, with no covering except a thick, horny hide the color of toadskin, and absolutely no hair of any kind upon its body anywhere. About the great, wide grinning mouth there hung a fringe of drooping, wart-like tentacles, and another fringe of similar protuberances dangled from its chin, if it could be said to have a chin, for the head and face were more like those of a horned toad or lizard than anything I can think of. There seemed to be some sort of belt or sash about the creature’s waist, and from it hung a wide-bladed shortsword without a scabbard.

“It stopped just inside the room, and looked around with dreadful, shining eyes that never changed expression, then came slip-slopping on its wide, splayed feet toward the bed where I lay petrified with horror.

“I wanted to scream, to jump up and run, to fling a pillow at the awful nightmare-thing which crept closer and closer, but all I could do was lie there and stare — I couldn’t even lower the arms I’d held out to my husband when I thought I heard him at the door.

“When it was almost up to me it spoke. ‘Don’t ’ee try and get away, my puss,’ it said, with a sort of horrible chuckle. ‘Tis many and many a year since the old one had a manchild to take a bride to wife, and the bargain was only for their bridenight; nothing more. Lie quiet while I warm my chilled face in your bosom, my pretty, for it’s been more time than you can know since I’ve done as much —’

“Then” — she paused a moment, fighting for breath like a winded runner finishing a race — “then it came over to me and put its arms about me — ugh! they were cold as something fished up from the river! — and kissed me — *kissed me on the mouth!*”

Her voice rose to a shrill, thin, scream as she finished, and for a moment

she gasped weakly, then fell back against her pillows, her slender torso retching with physical sickness induced by the dreadful memory.

I hastened to administer aromatic ammonia, and in a few minutes she regained comparative calm.

"I don't know what happened next," she whispered. "I fainted, and the next I knew I was here in bed, with Mother and the nurse beside me.

"Tell me," she added suddenly, "what's become of Walter? I've been so weak and miserable all the while that I've scarcely noticed his absence; but I haven't seen him once. Oh, Dr. Trowbridge, Dr. de Grandin, don't tell me that awful creature — that horrible monster — hurt him — killed — oh, no! That would be too cruel! Don't tell me, if it's so!"

"It is not so. *Madame*," de Grandin assured her gently. "*Monsieur* your husband has suffered severe shock, also, though as yet we do not know what induced it; but we believe he will soon be himself again; then we shall bring him to you."

"Oh, thank you, thank you, sir," she answered, the first smile showing on her pale, wasted face. "Oh, I'm so glad. My Walter, my beloved, is safe!" Clean, cleansing tears, overwrought woman's best restorative, coursed down her cheeks.

"Be of good courage, *Madame*," de Grandin bade. "You have suffered much, but you have youth and love, you have each other; you also have Jules de Grandin for ally. The odds are all in your favor. But of course."

3

"WELL, WHAT D'YE MAKE OF IT?" I demanded as we descended the Winnicott front steps. "Sounds to me as if she fell asleep and suffered such a nightmare that it carried over into her conscious mind, and —"

"And *Monsieur* her husband, who has been no less profoundly affected — did he also suffer a realistic *cauchemar* at the same time, perhaps?" broke in the Frenchman. "*Non*, my friend, your theory is untenable. I would it were not; the explanation would provide an easy exit from our difficulties."

I set my lips grimly. "D'ye know what I think?" I answered.

"*Parbleu*, do you?" his elfin grin took the sting from the sarcasm.

"I believe the poor girl was temporarily unbalanced by some dreadfully vivid dream, and when that worthless scoundrel she married realized it, he took her home — returned her like an unprincipled woman throwing back a piece of merchandise on a shopkeeper's hands!"

"But this so strange malady he suffered – still suffers?" de Grandin protested.

"Is malingering, pure and simple, or his guilty conscience prying on his mind," I returned.

"*Oh, la, la; le bon Dieu* preserve the little patience with which heaven has endowed Jules de Grandin!" he prayed. "My good Trowbridge, my excellent, practical one, ever seeing but so much oil and pigment in a painting, but so many hundredweight of stone in a statue. *Mort d'un coq*, but you annoy me, you vex me, you anger and enrage me – me, I could twist your so stupid neck! What lies behind all this I know no more than you, but may Satan serve me fried turnip with parsley if I traverse Monsieur Robin Hood's barnyard seeking a conventional explanation for something which fairly reeks of the superphysical. No, a reason there is, there must be, but you are as far from seeing it as an Iclander is from hearing the blackbirds whistle in the horsechestnuts of St. Cloud! Yes."

"Well, where are you going to hunt this supernatural explanation?" I demanded.

"I did not say supernatural," he answered acidly. "Everything is natural, though if we do not know, or if we misread nature's laws, we falsely call it otherwise. Consider: Fifty years ago a man beholding the radio would have called it supernatural, yet the laws of physics governing the device were known as well then as now. But their application had not yet been learned. So in this case. Who – or what – it was Madame Whitney beheld upon her bridal night we do not know, nor do we in anywise know why she should have seen it; but that it was no figment of a dream Jules de Grandin is prepared to wager his far from empty head. Certainly.

"Now, first, we shall interrogate Monsieur Whitney; perhaps he can tell us that which will put us on the proper track. Failing that, we shall make discreet inquiries at the inn where the manifestation was seen. In that way we may acquire information. In any event, we shall not cease to seek until we have found. No, Jules de Grandin is not lightly to be thrown off the trail of ghost or human evildoer, friend Trowbridge."

"Humph!" I grunted. There seemed nothing else to say.

4

"*DES BONNES NOUVELLES, MON AMI!*" de Grandin exclaimed. "But yes; certainly; assuredly we bring you great tidings of gladness. *Madame* your wife is most greatly improved, and if you show similar progress we shall take you to her within the week. Come, smile. Is it not wonderful?"

Walter Whitney raised a face which was like a death-mask of joy, and the smile he essayed was sadder than any tears. "I can't see her; I shall never see her again," he answered tonelessly.

"What is it you say? But this is infamous — monstrous!" the Frenchman exploded. "*Madame* your wife, who has but emerged from the valley of death's shadow, desires to see you; *la pauvre, belle creature*, she expected, she deserved happiness and love and tenderness; she has had only sorrow and suffering, and you sit there, *Monsieur*, like a bullfrog upon the marsh-bank, and say you can not see her! It is damnable, no less, *cordieu!*" He fairly sputtered in his fury.

"I know," Whitney answered wearily. "I'm the cause of it all; she'll suffer worse, though, if I see her again."

"What, *cochon!* — you would threaten her, the wife of your bosom?" De Grandin's strong, deceptively slender fingers worked spasmodically.

For an instant faint animation showed in young Whitney's somber, brooding face. "It isn't anything I'd do to her — I'd give my heart's blood to save her an instant's suffering! — but it's through me, though without my intention, that she's suffered as she has, and any attempt on my part to join her would only renew it: I can't see her, I mustn't see her again — ever. That's final."

"May Jules de Grandin stew everlastingly in hell with Judas Iscariot on his left hand and he who first invented Prohibition on his right if it be so!" the Frenchman cried. "*Lache*, coward, wife-deserter, attend me: From her parent's arms and from her loving home you took that pure, sweet girl. Before the holy altar of your God and before all men you vowed to love and cherish her for better, for worse, in sickness and in health. Together, beneath the golden beams of the honeymoon, you set forth upon life's pathway. *Ha*, it was most pretty, was it not?" He smiled sarcastically. "Then what? This, *mordieu*: At the inn *Madame* your wife experienced a shock, she became hysterical, temporarily deranged, we will say; it is often so when young girls leave the bridal altar for their husbands' arms. And you, what of you? *Ha*, you, the man on whose lips still clung the lying words you mouthed before the altar, you saw her so piteous condition, and like the poltroon you are, you did return her to her home; yes, to her parent's house; *pardieu*, you took her back as an unprincipled woman returns a damaged gown to the shopman! *Ha*, you decorate your sex, *Monsieur*; I do remove my hat in your so distinguished presence!" Seizing his wide-brimmed Panama, he clapped it on his head, then swept it nearly to the floor in an elaborate parody of a ceremonious bow.

White lines showed in Walter Whitney's face, deep wrinkles of distress cut

vertically down his cheeks. "It's not so!" he cried, struggling weakly to rise. "It's a damned, infernal lie! You know it is! Damn you, you slanderous rascal, you wouldn't dare talk so if I had my strength! I tell you, I'm responsible for Rosemary's condition today, though it's no fault of mine. I said I'd give my blood to spare her — good Lord, what do you think this renunciation is costing me? I — oh, you wouldn't understand; you'd say I was crazy if I told you!"

"Your pardon, *mon petit pauvre*," de Grandin answered quickly. "I did but hurt you to be kind, as the dentist tortures for a moment with his drill that the longer agony of toothache may be avoided. You have said what I wished; I shall *not* pronounce you crazy if you tell me all; on the contrary, I shall thank you greatly. Moreover, it is the only way that I can be rendered able to help you and Madame Whitney back to happiness. Come, begin at the beginning, and tell me what you can. I am all attention."

Whitney looked at him speculatively a moment. "If you laugh at me I'll wring your neck, when I get well," he threatened.

"I suppose you and Rosemary and everybody else were justified in thinking all you did of me when I took her home the other morning," he continued, "but I did it only because I knew nowhere else to go, and I knew my brain was going to snap 'most any minute, so I had to get her to a place of safety.

"I don't know whether you know it or not, Dr. Trowbridge," he added, turning to me, "but none of the men in my family that I can remember have ever married."

"Your father — " I began with a smile, but he waved the objection aside.

"I don't mean that. You've known us all; think of my uncles, my cousins, my elder brothers. See what I mean?"

I nodded. It was true. His mother's three brothers had died unmarried; had never, as far as I knew, even had sweethearts, though they were fine, sociable fellows, well provided for financially, and prime favorites with the ladies. Two of his cousins had perished in the World War, both bachelors; another was as confirmed in celibacy as I; the fourth had recently taken his vows as an Episcopal monk. His brothers, both many years his senior, were still single. No, the score was perfect. Walter was the first male of his blood to take a wife within living memory.

"Both your sisters married," I reminded him.

"That's just it; it doesn't affect the women."

"What in the world — " I began, but he turned from me to de Grandin.

"My parents were both past forty when I was born, sir," he explained.

"My brothers and sisters were all old enough to have had me for a child, and both the girls were married, with families of their own before I came. I used to wonder why all our men were bachelors, but when I mentioned it, nobody seemed to care to answer. Finally, when I was just through prep school and ready to go to Amherst, my Aunt Deborah took me aside and tried to make it plain.

"Poor old girl, I can see her now, almost ninety years of age, with a chin and nose that almost met and the shrewdest, most knowing eyes I've ever seen in a human face. I used to think the man who illustrated the fairy-tale books got his idea of the witches from looking at her when I was a little tad, and later I regarded her as a harmless old nut who'd rather find the hole than the doughnut any day. Well, she's got the laugh on me from the grave, all right.

"*'You must never think of marrying, Wally,' she told me. 'None of our men can, for it means only wo and calamity, usually death or madness for the wives, if they do. Look at your brothers, your uncles and your cousins; they'll never marry; neither must you.'*

"Naturally, I asked why. I'd had one or two heavy love affairs during prep days, and was already thinking seriously of settling down and raising a mustache and a family as soon as I graduated from college. Her statement rather seemed to cramp my style.

"*'Because it's a curse put on our family,' she answered. 'Way back, so far none of us know just how it happened, or why, one of our ancestors did something so utterly vile and wicked that his blood and his sons' blood has been cursed forever. We've traced our genealogy through the female line for generations, for two generations of the family have never lived to bear the same surname.'*

"*'See here' - she took me out into the hall where the old Quimper coat of arms hung framed upon the wall - 'that's the crest of the ancestor who brought the curse upon us. The family - at least his direct male descendants - died out in England centuries ago and the arms were struck from the rolls of the College of Heralds for want of one to bear them, but the blood's poisoned, and you've got it in your veins. Wally, you must never, never think of marrying. It would be kinder to kill the girl outright, instead!'*

"She was so earnest about it that she gave me the creeps, and laughing at her didn't better things.

"*'Once, long ago, so long that I can only remember hearing my parents talk of it when I was a very little girl,' she told me, 'one of our men dared the curse and married. His wife went stark, raving mad on her bridal night.*

and he lived to be a broken, embittered old man. That's the only instance I know of the rule being broken, but don't *you* break it, Wally, or you'll be sorry; you'll never forgive yourself for what you did to the girl you loved when you married her!"

"Aunt Deborah was dead and in her grave at Shadow Lawns when I came back from college, and Mother had only the vaguest notions of the curse. Like me, she was inclined to regard it as one of the old lady's crack-brained notions, and, though she never actually said so, I think she resented the influence the old girl had in keeping so many of our men single.

"Mother died two years ago, and I've lived here by myself since. Rosemary and I had known each other since the days when I used to scalp her every afternoon and hang her favorite doll in chains each morning, and while we've never really been sweethearts in our younger days, we'd always been the best of friends and kept up the old intimacy. Last Decoration Day I was a little late getting out to Shadow Lawns, and when I reached the family plot I met Rosemary coming away. She'd been putting flowers on my parents' graves.

"That really started it. We became engaged last fall, and, as you know, were married this month.

"Oh, Lord," his face went pale and strained as though with bodily torture, "if I'd only known! *If I'd only known!*"

"*Eh bien, Monsieur*, we also desire to know," de Grandin reminded.

"We'd planned everything," Whitney continued. "The house was to be redecorated throughout, and Rosemary and I were going to spend our honeymoon away while the painters were at their work here.

"The night we married we drove to Carteret Inn and I waited in the garden while she unpacked and made her toilet for the night. The blood was pounding at my temples and my breath came so fast it almost smothered me while I strolled about that moonlit garden.

"D'ye remember how you felt sort o' weak and trembly inside the first time you went up to ring a girl's doorbell — the first time you called on your first sweetheart?" he asked, turning a wan smile in my direction.

I nodded.

"That's how I felt that night. I'd been a clean-lived chap, Dr. Trowbridge. I'm not bragging; it just happened so; but that night I thanked God from the bottom of my heart that Rosemary could give me no more than I took to her — there's consolation for all the 'good times' missed in that kind of thought, sir."

Again I nodded, thoroughly ashamed of all the suspicions I'd voiced against the lad.

"I kept looking at my watch, and it seemed to me the thing must have stopped, but at last a half-hour crawled by — it seemed more like half a century. Then I went in.

"Just as I began to mount the stairs I thought I saw a shadow in the upper hall, but when I looked a second time it was gone; so I assumed it had been one of the hotel servants passing on his duties, and paid no more attention. The latch of our door seemed stuck somehow, or perhaps my nervous fingers were clumsy; at any rate, I had some trouble getting in. Then — "

He stopped so long I thought he had repented his decision to take us into his confidence, but at length he finished:

"Then I went in. My God! What a sight! Something like a man, but green all over, like a body that has lain in the river till it's ready to drop apart, was standing by the bed, holding Rosemary in its arms, and nuzzling at her bosom where her pajamas had been torn away with the most horrible, obscene mouth I've ever seen.

"I tried to rush the thing and beat it off, but my limbs were paralyzed; neither arm nor leg could I move. I couldn't even cry out to curse the foul nightmare-goblin that held my wife against its nude, slimy breast and wheezed and snuffled at her as an old, asthmatic dog might sniff and slaver at a wounded bird.

"At last the horror seemed aware of my presence. Still holding Rosemary in its arms, it lifted its misshapen head and grinned hellishly at me. Its eyes were big as silver dollars, and bright as fox-fire glowing in the marsh at night.

" 'I'm come to claim my rights, Sir Guy,' it told me, though why in God's name it should address me so I've no idea. ' 'Tis many a year since last one of your gentle line gave in to me; they've cheated me right handsomely by staying womanless; but you've been good to me, and I thank ye right kindly for it.'

"I stood and stared, petrified with horror, weak with positive physical nausea at the very sight of the fetid thing which held my wife, and the monster seemed suddenly to notice me again. "What, still here?" it croaked. 'Be off, ye churl! Have ye no more manners than to stand by staring while your liege lord wages his right? Be off, I say, or there ye'll stand till all is done, nor will ye lift a hand to stay me.'

"But I did lift a hand. The terror which had held me spellbound seemed to melt as I caught a glimpse of Rosemary's white face; and as the awful creature's flat, frog's-claw hands ripped another shred of her nightclothes away, I yelled and charged across the room to grapple with the thing.

"With a dreadful, tittering laugh it dropped Rosemary on the bed and turned to meet my onset, drawing a sort of short, wide-bladed sword from its girdle as it did so. I never had a chance. The slimy, naked monster was shorter by a foot than I, but for all its misshapen deformity it was quick as lightning and tremendously strong. Its arms, too, were half again as long as mine, and before I could land a single blow it hit me on the head with the flat of its sword and floored me. I tried to rise, but it was on me before I could struggle to my knees, beating at my head with its blade, and down I went like a beaten prize-fighter.

"How long I lay unconscious I do not know, but when I came to, the first faint streaks of morning were lighting the room, and I could see almost as plainly as by moonlight. The horrid apparition had vanished, but there was a strong, almost overpowering stench in the room — a stink like the smell of stagnant water that's clogged with drowned and rotting things.

"Rosemary lay half in, half out of the bed, her lips crushed and bruised and a darkened spot upon her nose, as though she had been struck in the face. Her nightclothes were ripped to tatters, the jacket hanging to her shoulders by shreds, the trousers almost ripped away, and there were stains of blood on them.

"I got some water from the bathroom and washed her poor, bruised face and bathed her wrists and temples. Then I found some fresh pajamas in her bag. Presently she waked, but didn't seem to know me. She didn't speak, she didn't move, just lay there in a sort of waking stupor, staring, staring, and seeing nothing, and every now and then she'd moan so pitifully it wrung my heart to hear her.

"After trying vainly to revive her for a time I managed to get her clothes on somehow and lugged her downstairs to the car. Nobody was awake at that hour; nobody saw us leave, and I didn't know which way to turn. Bladenstown is strange to me, I didn't know where to look for a doctor, and there was no one to ask. If I had found one, what could I have told him? How could I explain Rosemary's condition on her wedding night? You don't suppose he'd have believed me if I'd told him the truth, do you?

"So I turned back toward Harrisonville and all the time, as I drove, something inside me seemed to say accusingly: 'It's your fault; it's your fault; this is all your doing. You wouldn't listen to Aunt Deborah; now see what you've brought on Rosemary!'

"'Your fault — your fault — *your fault!*' the humming of my motor seemed to chuckle at me as I drove.

"And it was. Too late I realized how terrible the curse on our family

and what a dreadful ordeal I'd subjected Rosemary to. My heart was breaking when I reached her mother's house, and I couldn't find the words to tell her what had happened. I only knew I wanted to get away — to crawl off somewhere like a wounded dog and die.

"Then, as I left the Winnicott house and drove toward the center of the city, something seemed to go 'snap' inside my head, and the next I knew you gentlemen had me in hand.

"So now you know why I can never see Rosemary again," he finished. "If I yield to my heart's pleadings and go to her I know I shan't be strong enough to give her up, and rather than bring that thing on her again, I'll let her — and you, and all the world — think what you will of me, and when she sues me for divorce I'll not contest the action.

"Now tell me I'm crazy!" he challenged. "Tell me this is all the result of some shock you can't explain, and that I just imagined it. I don't care what you say — I was there; I saw it, and I know."

"Assuredly you do, *mon vieux*," de Grandin conceded, "nor do I think that you are crazy, though the good God knows you have admirable excuse if you were. *Non*, I believe you firmly, but your case is not so hopeless as it seems. Remember, Jules de Grandin is with you, and it shall go hard but I shall make a monkey of this so foul thing which had no more discretion than to thrust itself into your bridal chamber. Yes, *pardieu*, I promise it!"

5

"I'M SORRY FOR WHAT I SAID about that boy," I confessed contritely as we left young Whitney's house. "but appearances were certainly against him, and —"

"Zut, no apologies, my friend!" de Grandin admonished. "I am glad you lost your temper, for your suspicions, unworthy as they were, did furnish me with the very accusations I needed to sting him from his silence and force from him the explanation which shall aid us in our task."

"Explanation?" I echoed. "I don't see we're much nearer an explanation than we were before. It's true Walter's story corroborates Rosemary's, but —"

"But I damn think I see the glimmer of light ahead," the Frenchman cut in with a smile. "Consider: Did not you catch the two small clues Monsieur Walter let drop?"

"No, I can't say I did," I returned. "As far as I was concerned the whole business was an unrelated hodgepodge of horror, meaningless as the vagaries of a nightmare."

"What of the remarks made by the visitant concerning its having come to claim its rights?" he asked. "Or, by example, the odd manner in which it addressed the young Walter as Sir Guy? Does not that suggest something to you?"

"No, it doesn't."

"*Eh bien*, I should have known as much," he returned resignedly. "Come, if you have time, accompany me to New York. I think our friend, Dr. Jacoby, may be able to enlighten us somewhat."

"Who is he?"

"The curator of mediaeval literature at the *Musee Metropolitaine. Parbleu*" — he gave a short chuckle — "that man he knows every bit of scandalous gossip in the world, provided it dates no later than the Fifteenth Century!"

The long summer twilight was deepending into darkness as we entered the walnut-paneled, booklined office of Dr. Armand Jacoby in the big graystone building facing Fifth Avenue.

The learned doctor appeared anything but the profound savant he was, for he was excessively fat, almost entirely bald, and extremely untidy. His silk shirt, striped with alternate bands of purple and lavender, was open at the throat, his vivid green cravat was unknotted but still encircling his neck, and a thick layer of pipe-ashes besprinkled his gray-flannel trousers. "Hullo, de Grandin," he boomed in a voice as big and round as his own kettle-like abdomen, "glad to see you. What's on your mind? You must be in some sort of trouble, or you'd never have made the trip over in this infernal heat."

"*Tiens*, my friend," the Frenchman answered with a grin, "your perception is as bounteous as your hair!" Then, sobering quickly, he added: "Do you, by any happy chance, know of a mediaeval legend, well-authenticated or otherwise, wherein some knight, probably an Englishman, swore fealty to some demon of the underworld, or of the ancient heathen days, giving him *le Droit du Seigneur*?"

"What was that?" I interrupted before Jacoby could reply.

The doctor looked at me as a teacher might regard a singularly backward pupil, but his innate courtesy prompted his answer.

"It was the right enjoyed by feudal lords over the persons and property of their people," he told me. "In mediaeval times society was divided into three main classes, the nobility, with which the clergy might be classed, the freemen, and the serfs or villeins. The freemen were mostly inhabitants of towns, occasionally they were the yeomaury or small farmers, while the serfs or villeins were the laborers who cultivated the land. One of the

peculiarities of these poor creatures' condition was they were in no circumstances allowed to move from the estate where they lived, and when the land was sold they passed with it, just like any fixture. The lord of the manor had practically unlimited power over his serfs; he might take all they possessed and he might imprison them at his pleasure, for good reason or for no reason. When they died, whatever miserable property they had been able to accumulate became his instead of passing to their children. Even the burghers and yeomen were under certain duties to their lord or *seigneur*. They had to pay him certain moneys on stated occasions, such as defraying the expenses of knighting his eldest son, marrying his eldest daughter, of bailing him out when he was captured by the enemy. These rights were properly grouped under the term *Droit du Seigneur*, but in later times the expression came to have a specialized meaning, and referred to the absolute right enjoyed by many barons of spending the first night of marriage with the bride of any of his liegemen, occupying the hymeneal chamber with the bride while the bridegroom cooled his heels outside the door. Because of this it is probable that a third of the commoners' children in mediaeval Europe had gentle blood in their veins, although, of course, their social status was that of their mothers and putative fathers. The French and German peasants and burghers submitted, but the English yeomen and townsmen put one over on the nobles when they devised a law of inheritance whereby estates descended to the youngest, instead of the eldest son. You'll find it all in Blackstone's *Commentaries*, if you care to take the time."

"But - "

Dr. Jacoby waved my question aside with a waggle of his fat hand and turned directly to de Grandin. "It's an interesting question you raise," he said. "There are a dozen or more legends to that effect, and in Scotland and northern England there are several castles where the progeny of those demons who exercised their *Droit du Seigneur* are said to dwell in secret dungeons in a kind of limited immortality. There's one Scottish castle in particular where the head of the house is supposed to take the heir-apparent into his confidence upon his coming of age, tell him the story of the family scandal and give him the key to the dungeon where his half-man, half-demon relative is cooped up. No one but the head of the family and his heir are supposed to have these keys, and only they are permitted to see the monstrosity. There's a pleasant little story of the French wife of the Scottish laird who let her curiosity get the better of her, abstracted the dungeon key from her husband's dispatch case and went down to see for herself. They found her wandering about the cellar next morning, her hair

snow-white and her mind a blank. She ended her days in a lunatic asylum."

"Very good," de Grandin nodded. "But have you any memoranda of such a compact being made and carried out for several generations?"

"H'm," Dr. Jacoby caressed his fat chin with the fat thumb and forefinger of his wide, white hand. "No, I can't say I have. Usually these stories are buried so deep under additional legends that it's practically impossible to get at the root-legend, but — hey, wait a minute!" His big eyes lighted with enthusiasm behind the pebbles of his thick-lensed spectacles. "There is an old tale of that kind; Queberon, or Quampaire, or some such name was the man's and the demon was called — " He paused, pondering a moment, then: "No, it's no use, I can't remember it; but if you'll give me forty-eight hours I'll dig it out for you."

"Oh, my supreme, my superb, my so magnificent Jacoby!" de Grandin answered. "Always are you to be depended on. Your offer is more than satisfactory, my old one, and I am certain you are on the right track, for the modernized style of the name I have in mind is Quimper."

"Humph, that's not so modern," Jacoby answered. "I shouldn't be surprized if it's the original patronymic."

6

TWO DAYS LATER A THICK ENVELOPE arrived for de Grandin, and my excitement was almost equal to his as he slit the flap and unfolded several sheets of closely written foolscap.

"The legend you spoke of," Jacoby wrote, "is undoubtedly that of Sir Guy de Quimper — probably pronounced pronounced 'Kam-pay' and differently spelled in the Eleventh Century, since there was no recognized system of orthography in those days — who was supposed to have made a bargain with a North England demon in return for his deliverance during the battle of Ascalon. I've tried to modernize a monkish account of the deal: perhaps you'll learn what you wish from it, but I must remind you that those old monks were never the ones to spoil a good story for the truth's sake, and when sufficient facts were not forthcoming, they never hesitated to call on their imaginations."

"The warning was unnecessary," de Grandin laughed, "but we shall see what *Monsieur l'Historien* has to say, none the less."

"Pray ye for daughters, oh ye womenfolk of Quimper, and ask the Lord of His mercy and loving-kindness to grant ye bring no man-children into the world, for of a surety there rests upon the house of Quimper, entailed on

the male line, a curse the like of which was never known before, and, *priedieu*, may not be known again till the heavens be rolled up like a scroll and all the world stand mute before our God His judgment seat.

"For behold, it was a filthy act wrought by Sir Guy of eld, and with his words of blasphemy he bound forever the men of all his line to suffer through their womenfolk a dole and drearihead most dreadful.

"It was upon the day when our good Lord Godfrey of Bouillon, most prowessed of our Christian knights, with Good Sir Tancred and their little host of true believers smote the Paynim horde upon the plains of Ascalon and scattered them like straw before the winter blast that Guy of Quimper and his men-at-arms rode forth to battle for the Holy Sepulcher. Anon the battle waxed full fierce, and though our good knights rode down the infidel as oxen tread the grain upon the threshing-floor, nathless Sir Guy and his companions were separated from the main host and one by one the Christian soldiers watered the field of battle with their blood.

"And now cometh such a press of Paynim warlings that Sir Guy is fairly unseated from his charger and hurled upon the earth, whereat nigh upon a hundred of the infidel were fain to do him injury, and but that the stoutness of his armor held them off were like to have slaughtered him.

"Thrice did he struggle to arise, and thrice his weight of foemen bore him down, until at last, being sore beset and fearing that his time was come, he called aloud upon St. George, saying: 'Ho, good Messire St. George, thou patron of true knights of Britain, come hitherward and save thy servant who is worsted by these pestilent believers in the Antichrist!'

"But our good St. George answered not his prayer, nor was there any sign from heaven.

"Then my Sir Guy called right lustily upon St. Bride, St. Denis and St. Cuthbert, but the sainted ones heard not his prayer, for there were one and twenty thousand men embattled in the cause that day, and one man's plaint might soothly go unheard.

"Sir Guy of Quimper lifted up his voice no more, but resigned himself to Paradise, but an infidel's steel pierced through his visor bars, and he bethought him of the pleasant land of England which he should never see again, and of the gentle lady whose tears and prayers were for his safety. Then did he swear a mighty oath and cry aloud: 'If so be none will hear my prayer from heaven, then I renounce and cast them off as they have cast off me, and to the Saxon godlings of my forebears I turn. Ho, ye gods and goddesses of eld, who vanished from fair England at the coming of the Cross, hear one in whose veins courses Saxon Blood, and deliver him from

his plight. Name but your boon and ye shall have it, for I am most grievously afear'd my hour draweth nigh, unless ye intervene."

"And forthwith came a rustling o'er the plain, and from the welkin rode a shape which eye of man had not seen for many a hoary age. All nakedly it rode upon a naked horse, and at its heels came troops of hounds which ran like little pigs behind their dam, and in its hand it bore a shortsword of the ancient shape, the same the Saxon serfs brandished impotently against the chivalry of our good Duke of Normandy.

"'Who calls?' cried out the fearsome shape, 'and what shall be the guerdon of my service?'

"'Tis Guy of Quimper calls,' Sir Guy made answer, 'and I am sore beset. Do but deliver me from out the heathen's hand, and thy fee shall be whatsoe'er thou namest.'

"Then up there rose a monstrous wind, as cold as bleak November's, and on the wintry blast rode Dewer, Old Dewer, the ghostly huntsman of the North, all followed by his troop of little dogs, and with his good sword he smote them right and left, so that heads and heads fell everywhere, and scarce a Paynim stay'd to do him battle.

"And when the heathen host was fled Old Dewer unhorsed himself and leaned above Sir Guy and raised him up and set him on his feet. But so fearsome was his aspect and so ill-favored his face that Guy of Quimper was like to have fallen down again in a swoond at sight of it, but that he thought him of his oath, and making a brave face spake forth: 'Name now thy boon, for by the eyes of Sainted Agnes, well and truly hast thou earned it.'

"Whereat Old Dewer laughed full frightfully and said: 'Upon thy two knees now kneel, Sir Guy of Quimper, and claim me as thy overlord and name thyself my vassal liegeman, holding thy demesne as of fee from out my hand, upon condition that thy line shall give me seigneur's rights upon their bridal night, and this accord shall bind thee and thy heirs male forever unless such time shall rise as a woman of thy house shall stare me in the face and bid me hence from out her bower, which time I trow shall not be soon.' Thereat he laughed again, and the joints of Sir Guy's limbs were loosed and scarcely could he kneel erect before Old Dewer and place his hands between the monster's what time he spake the words of fealty.

"Thus came Sir Guy's deliverance from the Turk, but at such costs of tears as might almost wash out that woful wight his guilt. For on returning to his home Sir Guy found there a son whose name was likewise called Guy, and when his marriage banns were published some one and twenty years hence, and with singing and dancing and all glad minstrelsy the bride was put to bed, lo, forth from out the empty air came Dewer, Old Dewer of the

North, and claimed his right of seignury. And forth from out her bower came the bride upon the morn, her cheeks all stained with tears and her hair unloosed, and in her eyes the light of madness. Nor did she ever speak sane word again.

"And when the time was come that young Sir Guy's junior brother was to wed, Old Dewer rode forth from out the North to claim his fee, and thus for generation unto generation came he forth whenever and wherever the wedding bells did chime for one who had but one small drop of Quimper's blood within his veins. But the women molested he not, for it was not according to the compact that the female line be cursed.

"But those of Sir Guy's line who knew the curse forbore to wed, and some went into Holy Church, and by their prayers and ceaseless lamentations sought surcease of the curse, and others remained virgin all their days, according to the counsel of their elders, thus cheating that old fiend whose name is Dewer, surnamed the Huntsman.

"And some there were who taught their brides the words of power which should win freedom from the curse, but when the time was come they all cried craven, for where beneath the star-jeweled canopy of heaven dwells a woman with resolution to stare Old Dewer in the face and bid him hie himself away?

"And so throughout the length of years Old Dewer cometh ever, and when the womenfolk would drive him from their chambers their tongues cleave to the roofs of their mouths and they are speechless while he works his evil will, and never yet has there been found a bride who can retain her senses when from his foul mouth Old Dewer presses kisses on her lips.

"Pray ye for daughters, oh ye womenfolk of Quimper, and ask the Lord of His great mercy and loving-kindness to grant that ye bring no man-children into the world, for of a surety there rests upon the the men of Quimper a curse the like of which was never known before."

"I may add," Jacoby's letter ended, "that I consider the story entirely apocryphal. There seems no doubt that the Quimper family once existed in the north of England, and it is highly probable some representative of the house went to the Crusades, since practically every able-bodied man was drained from Europe during that prolonged period of hysteria. There are also semi-authentic data showing that one or more ladies of the house went mad, but whether their seizures dated from their wedding nights or not I can not say. The chances strongly favor the theory that the monkish chronicler seized upon the incidents of the brides' insanity to point a moral and adorn a tale, and for lack of an authentic one, provided the story from

his own imagination. There was at one time a decided movement among the English peasantry toward the worship, or at least a half-affectionate tolerance, of the old Saxon gods and goddesses, and it may well be the old monk invented the tale of Sir Guy's compact with 'Old Dewer' in order to frighten off any who expressed an opinion that the old gods might not have been the demons the Christian priests were wont to paint them.

"I might also add the Quimper arms were formally struck from the rolls two centuries or more ago because of failure of heirs in the house. Whether, as the old monk intimates, this was due to most of the men taking holy orders or remaining single in secular life, there is no way of telling. I favor the theory that one or more of the numerous plagues which swept England and the Continent in the old days, coupled with the hazards of war and the sea, may have wiped the family out."

"*Eh bien*, my friend, would you not open wide those great pop-eyes of yours, could you but know what we do?" de Grandin exclaimed as he finished the letter. "*Parbleu*, those old friars, they were great hands at dressing the truth in strange garments, but this one, I damn think has recited no more than the barest of bare facts."

"All right," I agreed, "suppose he did. While I think Dr. Jacoby is unquestionably right in his surmises, suppose we grant your premises for the sake of argument, where are we? If this mysterious goblin called Dewer actually pursues all male members of old Sir Guy's family, no matter how distantly they are related to him, and frightens them and their brides into fits, what are we to do about it? Is there any way we can prevent it?"

"You ask me?" he demanded sharply. "Pains of a rheumatic bullfrog, I shall say there is! Does not the never-enough-to-be-blessed old nameless monk make plain the formula in his chronicle? Does he not tell us the proviso Old Dewer himself made, that if a bride accosted by him should look him in the face and bid him be off, off he will go, and nevermore return? Name of a little blue man, can anything be simpler?"

"It certainly can," I answered. "In the first place, Rosemary Whitney was frightened almost out of her mind by the specter, or whatever it was she saw on her wedding night. We've had a man-sized job pulling her through this illness, and a second shock like that — even the bare suggestion that she face the ordeal again — might do such serious injury to her nervous system that she'd never recover.

"In the second place, if there is such a thing as this old goblin, and if it's as horrible to look at as Rosemary and Walter say, she'd faint dead away the moment she saw it, and never be able to say her little piece. No, old man, I'm afraid things aren't as simple as you seem to think."

"Ah bah," he held his arm up for my inspection, "has Jules de Grandin nothing up his sleeve besides his elbow, my friend? I tell you in my bag I have a trick still left which shall make a *sacre* singe of this Mousicur Dewer and send him home a wiser and much sadder demon. Yes; I have said it."

"What do you propose doing?"

"That, my friend, I shall show when the appointed time arrives. Meanwhile, let us labor with all our strength to restore Monsieur and Madame Whitney, that they may face their ordeal with calmness. Thus far their improvement has been most gratifying. Within a week we should be ready for the great experiment."

"Suppose they fail and have another relapse?" I queried. "Remember, de Grandin, this is the health and sanity of two people with which you're gambling."

"Suppose you cease from croaking like a raven suffering with laryngitis," he countered with a grin. "My throat is parched with answering your so pig-stupid objections. A glass of brandy – not too small – if you will be so kind."

7

BEYOND THE ROW OF RUSTLING POPLARS growing at the garden's lower boundary the moon sailed serenely in the zenith, gilding hedge and path and formal flowerbed with argent. Still farther off, where the river ran between lush banks of woodland, a choir of little frogs – "peepers" – sang serenades to the green-skinned ladies of their choice, and in an ancient cherry tree, so old it bore no fruit, though still put out its blossoms in the spring, a night-bird twittered sleepily.

"Ah, you are brave, *Madame*," de Grandin affirmed, "brave like the blessed Jeanne herself, and I do most solemnly declare that you shall conquer splendidly tonight."

Rosemary lifted starry eyes to his. Preceding us to the suite in Carteret Inn – the same rooms where she and Walter had lodged so happily a month before – she had doffed her traveling-dress and put on a *robe de nuit* of pale green crepe, drawing a kimono of oyster-white embroidered with gold over it. Her face was pallid as the silk of her robe, but lines of determination such as only a woman casting dice for love and happiness can know showed about her mouth as she faced Jules de Grandin. "I'm terribly afraid," she confessed in a voice that shook with nervousness, "but I'm going to do everything you tell me to, *just* as you tell me, for it's not only me I'm

fighting for, it's Walter and his happiness, and, Dr. de Grandin, I love him so!"

"*Precisement*," the little Frenchman took her hand in his and raised it to his lips, "exactly, *Madame*, quite so; and I believe that all I say is for the best. Now, if you please, compose yourself — so — that is excellent." From underneath his jacket he slipped a small silver-framed photograph of Walter Whitney and set it upright on the bureau before the seated girl. "Regard it fixedly, *Madame*," he bade; "gaze on the features of your beloved and think now much you love him — exclude all other thoughts from your mind."

It was as if he had ordered a starving man to eat, or commanded one rescued from the burning desert to drink a cup of cool water. The soft, adoring look which only women wholly slaves of love can give crept into the girl's eyes as she stared intently at the picture.

"Excellent," he murmured, "*tres excellent!*" For upward of a minute he stood there she had been his younger sister then, very softly, he commanded:

Madame, you are tired, you are fatigued, you much desire sleep. Sleep — sleep, *Madame Whitney*; I, Jules de Grandin, order it!

"Sleep — sleep — " softly as a summer breeze, soothingly as a mother's lullaby, his murmured admonition was repeated again and yet again.

Rosemary took no seeming notice of his words; her shining, sweet blue eyes stayed fixed upon her husband's photograph, but slowly, almost before I realized it, her white, blue-veined lids lowered, and she leaned back in her chair.

For a minute or two de Grandin regarded her solicitously, then: "*Madame Whitney!*" he called softly.

No answer.

"*Madame Whitney*, can you hear me?"

Still no response.

"*Tres bon*; she has passed into unconsciousness," he said, and, turning to the sleeping girl:

"Anon, *Madame*, there will come one of fearful aspect, who will accost you — endeavor to do you violence. Be not afraid, *ma chere*; he can not harm you. I tell you this and you must believe. You do believe me, *Madame?*"

"I believe you," she answered sleepily.

"Good; it is well. When this one comes you will know it, though you will not see him; nor will your conscious mind realize he is here. And when he comes you will open both your eyes and say — attend me carefully, for you *must* say these words — 'Dewer, enemy of my husband and of my husband's

blood, depart from hence, and come not near me any more; neither near me nor any woman whom my husband's kinsmen take to wife. Dewer, go hence.'

"When first he does approach you, you shall say this, and ever you will keep you widely opened eyes upon his foul face, yet see him you will not, for I command it. And if he goes not quickly from you, you shall repeat the words of power, nor shall you show him any sign of fear. You understand?"

"I understand."

"*Tres bien*. Into your bed then, and sleep and rest all peacefully until he comes."

Mechanically the girl arose, switched off the light and crossed to the bedstead, where she removed her slippers and kimono. In another moment her light even breathing sounded through the room.

I turned to descend the stairs to join Walter where he waited in the garden, but de Grandin's light touch upon my arm stayed me. "Not yet, my friend," he said; "come here, we should be near at hand in case our program goes awry." He led me toward the bathroom adjoining the suite.

It seemed an hour that we waited, though actually it must have been much less. The mournful music of the frogs, the distant hooting of a motor horn, the nearer chirping of some troubled bird were all the sounds we heard except the girl's soft breathing. Then, far away, but drawing nearer by the second, came the drumming of a horse's hoofs.

I looked out the bathroom's single little window, then drew back with an involuntary cry. Across the moon's pale face, like a drifting wisp of cloud, yet racing as no tempest-chased cloud could race, there rode the squat, sinister figure of a naked horseman upon a barebacked horse.

A moment I held my breath in acute terror, and the short hairs at the back of my neck rose stiffly and bristled against my collar. Then, more dreadful than the moon-obscuring vision, there came the sound of slipping, shuffling feet upon the floor outside the room, the door swung inward, and a light, tittering laugh which seemed all malice and no mirth sounded in the quiet room. Another instant and a fetid, nauseating stench assailed my nostrils, and I turned my head away to get a breath of pure air from the open window.

But Jules de Grandin seized my shoulder and fairly dragged me to the door. My heart stood still and all the breath in my body seemed concentrated in my throat as I looked into the moonlit chamber.

Something unspeakably obscene stood sharply outlined in a ray of silver moonlight, like an actor in some music hall of hell basking in the spotlight lit from the infernal fires. Like a toad it was, but such a toad as only lives in

nightmares, for it was four or more feet high, entirely covered with gray-green skin which hung in wrinkles from its twisted form, save where it stretched drum-tight across a bulging, pot-like belly.

The head was more like a lizard's than a toad's, and covered with pendulous, snake-like tentacles. A row of similar excrescences decorated its upper lip, and a fringe of dangling, worm-like things hung down beneath its chin. The goggle eyes, round and protuberant, seemed to glow with an inward light, and turned their terrifying, lidless stare in all directions at once.

The monstrous thing paused tentatively in the moonlight a moment, and once again the wicked, lecherous titter came from it. "I'm here again, my sparrow," it announced in a high, cracked voice. "Last time your booby husband — *he, he!*" — again that awful laugh! — "disturbed us at our tryst, but he'll not hamper us tonight — the beaten dog avoids his master!"

Again, seeming to struggle with some infirmity, the hideous thing lurched forward, but I had a feeling as I watched that those splayed, bandy legs could straighten instantly, and the whole flabby-looking body galvanize into frightful activity if need for action came.

Rosemary slept calmly, her head pillowed on one bent arm, and I heard de Grandin muttering mixed prayers and curses in mingled French and English as we waited her waking.

The visitant was almost at the bedside when Rosemary awakened. Rising as though in nowise terrified at the awful thing bending over her, she stared it boldly, calmly, in the face, no tremor of eyelid or twitch of lip betraying either fear or surprise.

"Dewer, enemy of my husband and of my husband's blood, depart from hence and come not near me any more; neither near me nor any woman whom my husband's kinsmen take to wife. Dewer, go hence!" she said.

The monster's webbed, clawed hands, already stretched forth to seize her, stopped short as if they had encountered an invisible wall of steel, and if such a thing were possible, its hideous face turned still more hideous. When pleased anticipation lit up its fearsome features they were terrible as the horror of a grisly dream, but when rage and unbelieving fury set on them the sight was too awful to look on. I hid my eyes behind my upraised hands.

But I did not stop my ears, so I heard it cry in a raging, squawking voice: "Nay, nay, ye're feared o' me; ye dare not bid me hence! Look, ye soft, pink thing, 'tis Dewer stands beside ye; Old Dewer o' the North, at sight of whom men creep upon their bellies and women lose their senses. Ye dare not stare me in the face and bid me hence! Look ye, and be afraid!"

"Dewer," the soft calm words might have been addressed to a servant

dismissed for pilfering from the pantry. "Dewer, enemy of my husband and of my husband's blood, depart from hence and come not near me any more!"

A skirling shriek like half a dozen bagpipes played out of tune at once came from the monster's mouth, and with a stamp of its wide, webbed foot, it turned and left the room. A moment later I heard the muffled beating of a horse's hoofs, and peering through the window saw a shade flit through past the moon.

"And now, my friend, let us, too, depart," de Grandin ordered as he tiptoed from the bathroom.

By Rosemary's bed he paused a moment while he whispered: "One comes soon, *ma chere*, who brings you happiness: happiness and love. Awake and greet him, and may the mellow beams of the honeymoon forever light you on your path to blissfulness. *Adieu!*"

"She waits above, *mon rieux*," he called to Walter as we passed through the garden. "Be good to her, *mon fils*, her happiness is in your hands: guard well your trust."

He was oddly silent on the homeward drive. Once or twice he heaved a sentimental sigh: as we approached my house he frankly wiped his eyes.

"What's the matter, old chap?" I asked. "Aren't you satisfied with your work?"

He seemed to waken from a reverie. "Satisfied?" he murmured almost dreamily. "*Ha* — yes, I wonder if she sometimes thinks of me within the quiet of her cloister, and of the days we wandered hand in hand beside the River Loire?"

"Who — Rosemary?" I asked, amazed.

"Who? — what? — *pardieu*, I do wander in my thoughts!" he cried. "I am asleep with both eyes open. Friend Trowbridge, Come, a quarter-pint of brandy will restore me!"



LAURA

(continued from page 59)

wrapping. Inside was a plain cardboard box to the cover of which had been affixed a small, square envelope. I extracted the contents and immediately recognized the handwriting.

"Dear Friend:

May I assure you that any further visit on your part will be your last.

L.

P.S.: Enclosed you will find something of interest."

Cautiously, I removed the lid of the box. My gloves! There was no question about it. Yet there was something strange about them. Why was the box so large? Why did the gloves seem to take up so much volume? I picked up the gloves to discover that each contained a human hand! As the blood dripped from the severed wrists onto the floor, I screamed repeatedly, then finally hurled the cursed things into the fire.



THE RECKONING

Most of those who voted did not comment on the Clewell cover, but of those who did, more expressed favor than disfavor. The first ballot tied three stories for first place. Thereafter, one of those three moved into undisputed first place and remained out in front right up to the end, although winning only by a nose (one more ballot could easily have tied the second place with the winner, if reversed positions).

Here is what the finish photo shows: (1) *The Monkey's Paw*, W.W. Jacobs; (2) *The Man Who Cast No Shadow*, Seabury Quinn; (3) *Horror Insured*, Paul Ernst; (4) *By Hands of the Dead*, Francis Flagg; (5) *Cry, Baby, Cry*, Henry Slesar. And the editor thanks the many readers who expressed appreciation of the de Grandin chronology.

the cauldron

Well, I had it coming; I took a statement that a member of the armed forces who wrote in to correct an "error" in *AIR WONDER STORIES* (a correction which neither Hugo Gernsback nor his Board of Scientific Experts found fault) as reliable, and thus contended that there is no such animal as an "automatic revolver" in my comments upon *A Compendium of Canonical Weaponry*, which I'm happy, at least, that I recommended.

Two readers have done their bit to see that I didn't get away with it, and perhaps more letters will come in later; but these two seem to cover the situation pretty thoroughly. (Please note that I said "seem"; later events might prove me wrong again. But then, that's what we're all here for – to make mistakes and learn from them so that we don't keep on repeating the same tired old ones, but go onward and upward – *Excelsior* – to bigger and better blunders.)

Franklin J.C. Hiller writes from Rochester, New York: "Your criticism of the error you found in *A Compendium of Canonical Weaponry*, the term 'an automatic revolver', is as erroneous as the error you criticize. This appeared in the Spring No. 15 issue of *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES*. You write of the 'pistol'; the 'revolver' and the 'automatic pistol'.

"Correctly, there are the pistol, the old-fashioned single shot affair, of which the Derringer is an example, and the single and double-action revolvers, which

you have described correctly, the semi-automatic (the full correct term is semi-automatic pistol, although even those who know better commonly refer to it only as an automatic) pistol, which does not rip off all of the cartridges in the magazine so long as the trigger is depressed, as you stated; and finally the machine pistol, one of Nazi-dom's less charming little toys, which does operate in this manner. A commonly known example of the semi-automatic pistol is the Army .45.

"The semi-automatic pistol does eject the spent shell and chambers a fresh round from the magazines, re-cocking the firing mechanism the while, so you are immediately ready to fire the next round, but you must depress the trigger each time for the round to fire. The first round after re-loading has to be chambered by hand by operating the slide, so when you see a detective or a gangster doing this in a movie, it isn't just to see that the gun is loaded, but also to chamber that first round and cock the pistol, so he will be ready to fire, should this become necessary, with the least loss of time.

"Since the double action revolver also brings a fresh round into position, and cocks itself with each pull, or squeeze, of the trigger, although it does not eject the spent shell, it would not be entirely incorrect to refer to a double-action revolver as a semi-automatic revolver, although this does not seem to be the custom. It would not be altogether incorrect, however.

"The machine pistol is quite similar in operation to the semi-automatic pistol, except for the action of the sear, that part of the mechanism that releases the hammer when the trigger is squeezed, and the form of the magazine. The upper portion of the magazine is a long box-like affair, quite similar to the ordinary semi-automatic pistol magazine, but it extends further into the drum which holds additional ammunition. Since it fires quite rapidly, if this provision of additional ammunition were omitted, you'd be firing and re-loading almost as frequently as with a single shot pistol.

"One thing that many people are forgetting in the controversy over the assassination of the late President Kennedy is that Oswald did not *have* to operate the bolt of his rifle *three times after* President Kennedy came into his view. Apparently *at least* three rounds were fired, and while Oswald (or whoever the assassin was, if you are in the group who does not believe Oswald committed the crime) would have had to operate the bolt three times, the *first operation of the bolt* could very well have been accomplished *long before the President came into view*, and Oswald only had to operate it *two more times* to get off the second and third rounds. *All he had to do for the first round, after taking aim, was squeeze the trigger just as though his weapon were semi-automatic!* How Oswald could have operated the bolt and fired three shots in so short a time seems to have puzzled a great many people. The simple and obvious answer is, as I've described above, *he didn't!* He operated the bolt only *twice* in the three or five (or whatever your opinion happens to be) seconds. I find it incredible that this has apparently occurred to no one else.

"P.S. There are, of course, also the old flint-lock and match-lock pistols."

Well, let's see: what is left? Mr. Hiller does not contend that anything *revolves* in the semi-automatic pistol, so that it would seem that I was on solid ground in claiming that there has never been any such thing as an "automatic revolver", but don't go away yet.

LTC (Ret.) Herman R. Jacks writes from Sierra Vista, Arizona: "To my knowledge, there were three (3) automatic revolvers. None are made today, and this weapon was unusual in that it combined all of the disadvantages of both the semi-automatic pistol and the revolver. Two of the weapons are very rare and little known. They are:

"Zulaica in .22 caliber made by M. Zulaica y Cia in Eibos, Spain.

"Union Arms Co., of Toledo, Ohio, in about 1904 made a small .32 caliber automatic revolver.

"The third and most common automatic revolver was the Webley-Fosbery, made in .455 caliber by the English Arms firm of Webley and Scott, of Birmingham, England. This weapon was introduced about 1903 and was made at least as late as World War I, and possibly into the 1920's. I have talked to persons who claim to have seen these in .38 caliber. I have only seen them in .455 caliber.

"This weapon could easily have been used by Sherlock Holmes and/or his opponents.

"The surface of the cylinder of these revolvers was grooved so that when the weapon recoiled, the top half of the arm slid back and a pin in the lower part engaged the groove in the cylinder and turned it; the hammer was cocked by the recoiling action.

"Your description of the three fundamental types of handguns is an oversimplification. I suppose that mankind has spent more of its energy and genius on devising ways to kill each other than on anything else. You should

see some of the weird (mostly unsuccessful) contraptions that have been devised. Many defy classification.

"There are many books on the subject. Some of the better ones are: (1) *Firearm Identification* - Mathews - University of Wisconsin; (2) *Automatic Arms* - Johnson & Horen - Morrow; (3) *English Pistols and Revolvers* - George; (4) *Textbook of Pistols and Revolvers* - Hatcher - Small Arms Technical Publishing Co. These books are all, I believe, out of print, but the firearms section of your library will reveal many more, and possibly these four.

"This issue, as usual, filled me with nostalgia, since I read most of the stories years ago, in my teens. Truly outstanding, and my favorite, was the Jules de Grandin tale by Seabury Quinn.

"The conclusion of your article on de Grandin was most enjoyable. I especially appreciated the reproductions of the covers. How about reproducing *all* the de Grandin covers?

"The most exciting news to me, though, was the announcement of another unpublished 'Taine of San Francisco' story by David H. Keller, M.D. for the next issue. How many of these unpublished 'Taine' stories are there?"

"Keep up the good work."

My thanks to these two active readers, and my apologies to the editors of the *Compendium of Canonical Weaponry*. It is "a catalogue and description on the implements of foul play and justice in the writings of John H. Watson, M.D." The publisher is Luther Norris, 3844 Watseka Avenue, Culver City, California 90230. This attractive pamphlet is delightfully illustrated by Tom Walker; contains 44pp. quarto size, neatly printed on excellent paper, and sells for \$3.00.

Every true Sherlockian will want a copy, I'm sure.

As you noted, the reproduction of those covers from the de Grandin stories was not too clear. However, when it is possible to get reproduction at least as good, then we'll use the cover along with the story. Unhappily, there are a number where this will not be possible.

The late Mrs. Celia Keller sent me one other professionally unpublished story dealing with Taine of San Francisco. It was not quite a bad story, but the over-use of coincidence (the villain just happens to have a heart attack when he is about to do Taine in; the villainess just happens to slip on a banana peel - which another character has just happened to throw on the floor earlier - at the crucial moment, and just happens to be holding a knife in exactly the right position so that in falling she is instantly slain - I kid you not!) makes the tale more laughable than unusual, eerie, or strange; so I sent it back to her with regrets. I enjoyed it myself, but could not persuade myself that our readers would share my amusement, and the story is at least as long as *The Temple of Death*. Whether there are still other unpublished adventures of Taine, I do not know.

Charles Hidley writes from Harrisburg, Penna.: "It's surprising to realize that, despite many re-readings, radio broadcasts, and TV viewings, *The Monkey's Paw* still is so strongly and classically pure in its simplicity that it easily nudged out the longer yarns in the issue for first place. In fact, as Miss Francis says, 'there's no contest' and I've just re-shuffled my preference page, giving it an 'outstanding' vote.

"OK - so I'll give *Horror Insured* the No. 1 position: it's so damned cinematic, what with a dragon (sic) and three flaming and faintly screaming revenants that I was pushed over. But, my God,

the writing and posturing are too, too awful.

"My buddy, de Grandin, was standard – in the best sense of that word – this issue, and Flagg's admixture of spiritualism and machinery was an intriguing seed that could be nurtured to a more exotic plant than here achieved.



"I have a particular horror of stories in which little children are maltreated, but I guess *Cry, Baby, Cry* must be acknowledged as good filler and, I must admit, the last paragraph was a corker. I believe that one of the summits of the outre is a protagonists's rushing to wrestle with monstrosity, rather than fleeing from it.

"Thank you for all six illustrations. How could anyone be indifferent to the macabre and suggestive beauty of *The Thing in the Fog* or *Frozen Beauty*? Indeed, those were the days."

Yes. . . and those were the days when a letter like yours would draw such comment as "This letter speaks for itself," etc. But truth to tell, some letters we receive and run are so sufficient that they really do, you know. The only comment I can make is that, thus far, the other active readers seem to share your estimate of *The Monkey's Paw*,

which has the simple effectiveness that Dr. Keller sought to achieve, and sometimes did, splendidly; as in *A Piece of Linoleum*, *The Thing in the Cellar*, and *The Dead Woman* – his most popular horror stories.

Ned Reece writes from Kannapolis, N.C.: "Suggestions: enlarge cover picture; use longer stories, even if you have to run them in several issues; (would prefer them in one issue, if possible); give us more pages per issue, even if you increase the price; publish more often; go back to the system of your first four issues, and staple pages through the top, instead of through the center of the spine."

Our new title, *BIZARRE FANTASY TALES*, is offering longer stories, complete in one issue. We cannot persuade ourselves (as much as I'd like to, since I myself love continued stories) that our readers will respond favorably to having to wait three months for the conclusion of a two-part serial, let alone the continuation of a longer one.

The Editor has a voice, but no effective vote on cover policy; and the line here is that where one potential purchaser may be attracted by the cover picture, another will need titles and authors' names to persuade him – since we are appealing to nostalgia to a very large extent. To enlarge the cover picture would necessarily reduce the area needed for type – and there's hardly much point in putting a title and author's name on the cover if the magazine has to be picked up and scrutinized closely before the titles can be read.

Rather than publish any individual magazine more often, it has been necessary to reduce the schedule on the individual magazines, so that all are appearing quarterly. However, this has also entailed our bringing out a new title, so that you actually will be seeing us

Here Are The Complete Contents of Some of Our Earlier Issues

#1, Summer 1966: *Village of the Dead*, Edward D. Hoch; *House of the Hatchet*, Robert Bloch; *The Off-Season*, Gerald W. Page; *The Tell-Tale Heart*, Edgar Allan Poe; *The Lurking Fear*, H. P. Lovecraft; *The Awful Injustice*, S. B. H. Hurst; *Ferguson's Capsules*, August Derleth; *The Mansion of Unholy Magic*, Seabury Quinn.

#2, Fall 1968: *The House of Horror*, Seabury Quinn; *The Men in Black*, John Brunner; *The Strange Case of Pascal*, Roger Eugene Ulmer; *The Witch is Dead*, Edward D. Hoch; *Doctor Satan*, Paul Ernst; *The Secret of the City*, Terry Carr & Ted White; *The Street* (verse), Robert A. W. Lowndes; *The Scourge of B'Moth*, Bertam Russell.

#3, Winter 1966/67: *The Inn of Terror*, Gaston Leroux; *The Other*, Robert A. W. Lowndes; *The Door of Doom*, Hugh B. Cave; *A Matter of Breeding*, Ralph Hayes; *Esmerelda*, Rama Wells; *The Trial for Murder*, Charles Dickens & Charles Collins; *The Blood-Flower*, Seabury Quinn.

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more often; so long as the present new schedule can be maintained, there will be one of our weird reprint magazines coming out every month, and four times a year, *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES* will be paired with *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*.

It has not, alas, been possible to increase the number of pages, return to backbone binding, either with staples or the perfect binding system, or anything else which would increase costs, however slightly – and such things would be somewhat more than slight. In fact, we have been forced to raise the price in order to keep appearing at all; circulation has increased, but slowly and in small numbers during any particular time, while expenses have increased rapidly and in large amounts.

Thank you for the titles of stories suggested for reprint. Some of them are already on my list; some will go upon the list; others are unavailable to me under present circumstances – but you will see at least some of your suggested stories eventually. Incidentally, we have run one story you suggest: *The Red Sail*, by Charles Hilan Craig; this appeared in the September 1969 issue of *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*, No. 29.

Ed Stiles writes from Moundsville, West Virginia: "This was a very fine issue, story-wise. I am very fond of the Jules de Grandin stories, but even in my prejudiced book he was hard pushed to hold the No. 1 spot with these stories. It's been years since I read *The Monkey's Paw*, but the re-reading of it convinces me that it is a true classic.

"I would like to see a cover somewhat on the order of the *COVEN 13* magazine. Possibly this would be of too great an expense. Other than this, I just cannot praise your magazines highly enough. I would like to see a de Grandin story in every issue. Even after buying *The Phantom Fighter*, I am going to have to live 40 more years to read all the

stories, at the rate of two a year. I am also in favor of serializing novels in your magazines. *WEIRD TALES* had several good ones. *The Trial of the Cloven Hoof*, by Arlton Eadie was one of my favorites."

I remember the Eadie novel well, as I read most of the installments when I was in Maine, in the CCCs, in 1934. It's very long, however — seven installments — and I doubt that it would fit into one issue of SMS; I doubt even more that our other readers would tolerate a four part serial, taking a year to complete. For if my feeling that this novel is longer than *The Devil's Bride* (which had to run in three parts, and even then cramped the issues for other stories) is correct, then four installments would be needed. I put aside the question of whether *The Trail of the Cloven Hoof* is really that outstanding, noting only that my last re-reading of it, around ten years ago, did not awaken much enthusiasm for it.

Ted H. Straus writes from San Francisco: "As indicated in my letter of March 1st, *The Monkey's Paw* is an all-time favorite of mine, hence its first-place rating. *Cry, Baby, Cry* got my No. 1, as it's a fine chiller circa the present. *Horror Insured* came next with a No. 2, as Paul Ernst is always good, albeit dated. Finally, *The Man Who Cast No Shadow* I rate No. 3 because, though it's a good period piece, and must have been very effective in 1927 (the same year as MGM's movie, *London After Midnight*, starring Lon Chaney, was released, and but three years before Bela Lugosi starred in Universal's still-gripping *Dracula*), Seabury Quinn's tale is very old-hat by now. The cover was great (though the skull does look like it's from the 'now' generation, with all that hair!") "All in all, a fine issue."

(turn page)

Have You Missed Our Earlier Issues?

#4, Spring 1967: *The Tottenham Werewolf*, August Derleth; *The Secret of Lost Valley*, Robert E. Howard; *Medium for Justice*, Victor Rousseau; *Si Urag of the Tail*, Oscar Cook; *The Temptation of Harringay*, H. G. Wells; *The Tenants of Broussac*, Seabury Quinn.

#5, Summer 1967: *The Gods of East and West*, Seabury Quinn; *The Council & The House* (verse), Robert A. W. Lowndes; *Behind the Curtain*, Leslie Jones; *A Game of Chess*, Robert Barr (introduction by Sam Moskowitz); *The Man from Nowhere*, Edward D. Hoch; *The Darkness on Fifth Avenue*, Murray Leinster.

#6, Fall 1967: *My Lady of the Tunnel*, Arthur J. Burks; *The Glass Floor*, Stephen King; *Death from Within*, Sterling S. Cramer; *A Vision* (verse), Robert E. Howard; *Aim of for Perfection*, Beverly Haaf; *The Dark Castle*, Marion Brandon; *Dona Diabla*, Anna Hunger; *The Druid's Shadow*, Seabury Quinn.

#7, Winter 1967/68: *The Bride of the Peacock*, E. Hoffmann Price; *Nice Old House*, Dona Tolson; *Those Who Seek*, August Derleth; *John Bartine's Watch*, Ambrose Bierce; *The Pet of Mrs. Lilith*, Robert Barbour Johnson; *The Man Who Chained the Lightning*, Paul Ernst.

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I saw the famous *London After Midnight* at least twice at a re-run theater in Stamford, Conn., either in 1928 or 1929, and it was a real thriller. I don't recall now whether it was Conrad Nagel or Conway Tearle who was the juvenile lead — it may have been neither, but I have a feeling it was one of those two. At any rate, 1935 came around, with a film called *Mark of the Vampire*, starring Bela Lugosi, Lionel Barrymore, Jean Hersholt, and others. I was living in Darien at the time, and calculated that if I walked to Stamford, I could afford the price of the movie. So I walked. And partway through the film, I realized that this was essentially a re-make of *London After Midnight*, very disappointing, since even though various aspects were different, and some better done, I knew

exactly what was going to happen. In the old silent version, Lon Chaney was both the coroner and the vampire; suspecting that the supposed suicide was really rather ingenious murder, he enlisted a group of actors, from a circus, to assist him, and played the role of the vampire himself. In the 1935 version, Lionel Barrymore does the detecting, and Bela Lugosi is the vampire — there was a chilling corpse-woman, too, but she has little to do but to look gruesome. On the whole, I'd say that *Mark of the Vampire* is really the better of the two, and if you can put aside fondness for Lon Chaney for the purpose of sound criticism, I believe you might agree that the later version was really much better done. Even at the time, for all my disappointment, I was aware of that.



THE EDITOR'S PAGE

(Continued from Page 9)

knows all these horrors, Fr. Brown says, "Oh, by being a celibate simpleton, I suppose . . ." (Flambeau has called him that just before the climax) and continues with the quotation about clerical awareness of evil cited above, ending with: 'But as a matter of fact, another part of my trade, too, made me sure you weren't a priest.'

"What?" asked the thief, almost gasping.

"You attacked reason," said Father Brown. 'It's bad theology.'

I do not know whether a real Roman Catholic priest would attack reason today, but at the time of this story, such behavior might well have been grounds for suspicion of imposture. The reason

why I cite this, however; is that it is typical of Chesterton's methods. The average Protestant, and the average person in general, would have seen nothing amiss in Flambeau's statement. (I didn't myself, upon first reading.) They would have assumed, being ignorant of theology and Catholicism in general, that this was the way these mystic, unworldly celibates talked. And while Father Brown does not repeat the same words in later stories, a *leitmotif* has been struck; people around him will be flabbergasted because he does not think, and react the way they are sure that a Roman Catholic priest would think and react. They set out to prove Fr. Brown a fool and in the process

Coming Next Issue

When the wind struck the house from which Kathryn had watched it, the windows were all down. She had shouted of a storm approaching. Clouds, too, began suddenly to appear in writhing, ominous masses. The house had been closed tightly by the agitated Mr. Heracles Tribble, who hastened out to his henhouses to see to their security before the storm came, and did not come back.

Kathryn watched from the window. The rolling cloud of dust that was the forefront of the wind drew nearer with incredible speed. As it drew close, the monstrous size of the disturbance became apparent. It was hundreds of feet high, and it was rolling over and over upon itself like a monstrous comber.

There seemed even to be striations in it like those the stranding of a rope will make. But there were objects carried in the smoke-colored rolling cloud. Dark objects, of all shapes and sizes. Kathryn, staring and almost paralyzed by sheer astonishment, saw the tree-limbs and it seemed even whole trees caught up in the monstrous turmoil.

Somehow her eyes swept to the henhouses at the rear of the house. Mr. Heracles Tribble was standing in the open, peculiarly puny and ineffectual, staring incredulously at the thing that bore down upon him. He was small, rotund, and bald. He wore silver-rimmed spectacles, and he stared at a rolling wave of smoke and dust and utter destruction, hundreds of feet high, that swept toward him irresistibly.

Mr. Heracles Tribble turned suddenly, and fled toward the house. Kathryn saw his mouth dropped open in horror. His fat little legs twinkled. He ran with incredible speed. But the rolling cloud of dust and debris had reached the pasture-lot. It touched the hen-houses and they vanished as if blown to atoms.

Unpausing, the monstrous thing came rolling up. Its bellying edge was over the house while its base had still not yet touched the running little fat man. But then Kathryn saw smoke-like dust envelop him. She saw – or thought she saw – that he rose crazily from the ground. And then the wave of wind struck the house.

It was absurd, but Kathryn was not frightened even the instant after she knew the wind had struck. Her first conscious thought was that the house had been lifted away from around her, leaving her untouched.

Then she realized that the house still stood. There was no roof over her head, to be sure, but the walls remained intact. The feeling of being in the open air came from the fact that without warning or a sound that could be heard above the deafening uproar of the wind, the windows had ceased to be. The glass panes broke out of them with no more disturbance than so many breaking bubble-films would have made.

It was not nature-made, but man-made; it was

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by Murray Leinster

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reveal themselves as ridden with silly notions, some of which have the force of superstitions and many of which are labelled "scientific." Examined in the light of simple reason, his critics prove to be anti-scientific; Fr. Brown, while not a scientist, is a more true friend of genuine science than the worshippers at the shrine of Scientism — a cult which has greatly expanded since these stories were written.

There are five volumes of the Father Brown stories.

The Innocence of Father Brown (1911) has 12 stories: *The Blue Cross*, *The Secret Garden*, *The Queer Feet*, *The Flying Stars*, *The Invisible Man*, *The Honour of Israel Gow*, *The Wrong Shape*, *The Sins of Prince Saradine*, *The Hammer of God*, *The Eye of Apollo*, *The Sign of the Broken Sword*, and *The Three Tools of Death*. I list the entire contents, as all twelve stories are strong ones, and if you encounter a softcover edition, this would be an excellent start. There are elements of social satire throughout the series, and *The Queer Feet* constitutes an example, relating, as it does, why the members of a certain highly exclusive dining society wear green coats. Valentine reappears in *The Secret Garden* and Flambeau in *The Queer Feet* and *The Flying Stars*; at the end of the latter, Fr. Brown makes his appeal to Flambeau to give up the criminal life. We find out in later stories that Brown was successful, as Flambeau appears in many of them as a retired thief, now a private detective, and close friend of the priest. Flambeau never becomes a Watson, however, and none of the stories are told from his viewpoint.

Incidentally, a good way of testing your ability to match wits with the author and Father Brown would be this — if you have not already read *The Flying Stars*. Read the story up to the point, near the end, where Fr. Brown



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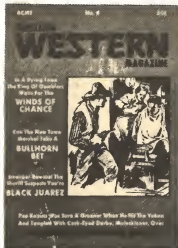
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goes out of the house into the garden and looks up into a tree where he knows Flambeau is. Stop there. You know that he is going to speak to Flambeau, to persuade him to return the jewelry he has stolen so ingeniously, and to give up the life he is now leading. Stop; think about Fr. Brown and your own impressions of how a Roman Catholic priest would talk to such a criminal. Then jot down briefly your idea of the actual grounds upon which Fr. Brown appeals to Flambeau.

I'd be willing to bet with anyone that you (Friend Anyone) would not even come close. In fact, if you wanted to make a game of it, betting with your friends who might want to play (Not having read the story, of course), I'd say that the odds were greatly in your favor.

The Hammer of God, may be among the most frequently-reprinted of the stories. I'm not positive, but I believe that it was the first one I read, in an anthology of famous mystery tales in the high school library, back in Darien circa 1931. *The Honour of Israel Gow* perfectly illustrates Holmes' dictum that when the impossible has been eliminated, then what remains is the truth, however improbable. The clues are there. And it is in *The Sign of the Broken Sword* that we get the well-known quotation: "Where would a wise man hide a leaf? In the forest." Less well known is the subsequent line: "If there were no forest, he would make a forest. And if he wished to hide a dead leaf, he would make a dead forest." All relating to a historical riddle (I assume, it is fictional history) and one of the most gruesome means of hiding the body of a murdered man that I've ever seen in fiction.

The Wisdom of Father Brown, (1914 - 12 stories, including *The Absence of Mr. Glass*, *The Paradise of Thieves*, *The Mistake of the Machine*,



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*The Purple Wig, The Perishing of the Pendragons, and The Salad of Colonel Cray.*) The final three of the tales particularly noted contain seemingly supernatural elements; but Father Brown always assumes a natural explanation for the weirdest of events, and finds it after others have fallen into mystified stupefaction at what looks "supernatural." *The Mistake of the Machine* may not have been the first, but was certainly among the first detective stories to point out the fundamental flaw in mechanical lie-detectors.

*The Incredulity of Father Brown* (1926 - 8 stories, all of them strong: *The Resurrection of Father Brown, The Arrow of Heaven, The Oracle of the Dog, The Miracle of Moon Crescent, The Curse of the Golden Cross, The Dagger With Wings, The Doom of the Darnaways, and The Ghost of Gideon Wise.*) It is from *The Oracle of the Dog*, that we get the famous quotation: "The dog could almost have told you the story, if he could talk," said the priest. "All I complain of is that because he couldn't talk, you made up his story for him, and made him talk with the tongues of men and angels."

And he continues: "It's part of something I've noticed more and more in the modern world, appearing in all sorts of newspaper rumours and conversational catchwords; something that's arbitrary without being authoritative. People readily swallow the untested claims of this, that, or other. It's drowning all your old rationalism and scepticism, it's coming in like a sea; and the name of it is superstition. It's the first effect of not believing in God that you lose your common sense, and can't see things as they are. Anything that anybody talks about, and says there's a good deal in it, extends itself indefinitely like a vista in a nightmare."

*The Miracle of Moon Crescent* is beautifully caustic in the difference between what Father Brown and a group of self-proclaimed "scientific" laymen are willing to call a miracle. And *The Doom of the Darnaways* punctures the old tried-and-true doom of the family stories. We all may (and perhaps should) continue to enjoy them as fiction, but I think I'll always remember, even then, how silly it all becomes when you drop resounding names like "Darnaway" and speak of the Doom of the Browns. Oh, doubtless some folk named Brown have met direful enough dooms, but somehow the wings of horror don't flap fearsomely over the thought.

*The Secret of Father Brown* (1927 - 10 stories, the first and last as frames. In the first, the title story, Father Brown reveals his method in order to prevent being credited with supernatural powers by The Second Sight Sisterhood; the eight stories that follow are examples; then we conclude with *The Secret of Flambeau.*) Particularly good in this volume are *The Man with Two Beards, The Song of the Flying Fish, The Red Moon of Meru, and The Chief Mourner of Marne.* The last mentioned is especially biting in its portrayal of the difference between what most people call human charity and what Father Brown calls Christian charity. Fr. Brown is soundly denounced for lack of charity toward sinners so long as the company involved in the story believes that the homicide involved was a duel. When they learn that it was not, but genuinely foul murder by treachery, they change their tune drastically. One of them says there is a limit to human charity, and Fr. Brown replies: "There is...and that is the real difference between human charity and Christian charity. You must forgive me if I was not altogether crushed by your contempt for my uncharitableness

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today; or by the lectures you read me about pardon for every sinner. For it seems to me that you only pardon the sins that you don't really think sinful. You only forgive criminals when they commit what you don't regard as crimes, but rather as conventions. So you tolerate a conventional duel, just as you tolerate a conventional divorce. You forgive because there isn't anything to be forgiven."

Someone objects that he doesn't expect them to be able to pardon a vile thing like this, does he? Fr. Brown replies, no, he does not, but priests *have* to be able to pardon it. "... We alone are left to deliver them from despair when your human charity deserts them. Go on your own primrose path pardoning all your favorite vices and being generous to your fashionable crimes; and leave us in the darkness, vampires of the night, to console those who really need consolation; who do the really indefensible things, that neither the world nor they themselves can defend; and none but a priest will pardon..."

*The Scandal of Father Brown* (1935 - 9 stories, including *The Quick One*, *The Blast of the Book*, *The Green Man*, and *The Crime of the Communist*.) In the title story, Father Brown sees the truth almost at once, simply because he is *not* a romanticist; he remains untouched by *The Blast of the Book* (an amusing take-off on *Necronomicon*-like things, although whether Chesterton ever read H.P. Lovecraft is unknown to me) because he is not superstitious; and you should realize by now that *The Crime of the Communist* is nothing at all like what the title would lead you to expect.

There is one more story, the last Father Brown tale Chesterton wrote: *The Vampire of the Village*. All 51 stories can be found in 1951 (New and Revised Edition) volume of *The Father*

*Brown Omnibus*, published by Dodd, Mead & Company. The earlier edition does not contain the final short story, which is a very good one.

What is the basis of the appeal that Father Brown has had for literate mystery story lovers from the very first? I would suggest, first of all, that these are intricate mysteries relating to general human motivation and behavior, much more than crime tales, although nearly all concern themselves with crimes. More than this, they are heavy in paradox, which not only tests the wits, but also stimulates thought about the difference between appearances and reality.

G.K. Chesterton is not a magician on the order of A. Conan Doyle. As W.W. Robson points out in his article, *G.K. Chesterton's "Father Brown" Stories*, in the Summer 1969 issue of *THE SOUTHERN REVIEW* it is the magic view of Holmes which we receive through Watson's admiring eyes that convinces us of the Master Detective's greatness. One need only read the two tales in the canon written by Holmes himself to see the difference. We who are under Watson's spell love *The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier*, and *The Adventure of the Lion's Mane*, even when we are aware of the flat quality of Holmes' presentation, because the mesmerism that the good Watson has woven around us lingers, so that we see Holmes himself as Watson has trained us to see him. But a person who had never read a single Holmes story, or seen a film, etc., could never discover from reading these two tales why actual and spiritual members of the Baker Street Irregulars are so enthralled.

There is no such spell over Father Brown, nothing at all to glamorize him as Holmes is so transformed by his Boswell. (Remember: Holmes does not recognize himself in Watson's accounts, and feels that his friend and colleague

has distorted things and neglected what is really of importance.) The spell here is the spell of a prestidigitator, Chesterton himself. And there is a spell, for we see only what the people around Father Brown see (except when we're awfully clever, and perhaps have learned how to catch Chesterton in one of his repeated acts), so we are baffled as they. After a few stories, we may realize that what appears to be is not so – and yet, how seldom will most readers see as clearly as the bumbling little priest, who (it must be said) hardly ever comes to life as a "real" character – but yet is so satisfactory for exactly what Chesterton has made him to be.

Consider *The Green Man*. As Robson points out, the essential clue is given directly. Here it is: "Then Harker spoke, and his voice rang hollow in the room.

"I am sorry to say we are bearers of bad news. Admiral Craven was drowned before reaching home . . .

"When did this happen?" asked the priest."

"Where was he found?" asked the lawyer."

At that Father Brown knows the answer to the mystery, and I should have seen it myself, but didn't. If you do not already know the story, see if you can come to the conclusion that Father Brown did before you read the footnote below.\*

The Father Brown stories derive, of course, from Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin tale, *The Purloined Letter*. For in one way or another, the solution to the mystery these stories, is nearly always right out in plain sight – but turned inside out, at least, that was the case for British readers when the stories were written. For American readers of half a century later, some of what the truly alert reader of the day might have spotted is now obscure; in a number of instances, we have a sporting chance only if we have specialized knowledge

about matters which were more generally known then.

But sometimes it is, indeed, only a matter of the essential being somewhat more generally known. The reason why the culprit is able to get away with a flagrant imposture in *The Vampire of the Village* is that, even at the time, most members of the Church of England not only did not know much about Roman Catholicism (which Fr. Brown would hardly expect them to) but they did not know much about the C. of E., either. This was circa 1935. But a present day reader who knew something of the great Anglican controversies (and a Roman Catholic priest in England at that time, had studied them) could solve the mystery. However, only a few of the stories really turn upon such specialized data.

So far as I am aware, there is no Father Brown Society, nor ever has been; and I can see no reason why there ever should be. The whole point about the mock earnest scholarship of the Baker Street Irregulars springs from the fact that John Watson, M.D. was not a careful writer and frequently contradicted himself or made curious statements which could not be so under



\*With no more data than that, persons hearing it would assume that the Admiral was lost at sea. The question, "Where was he found?" could relevantly be asked only by someone who knew that the Admiral was *not* drowned at sea.

Chesterton slips in this story, by having Father Brown know something which he could not have known – the motive for the murder, which he has no opportunity to uncover. However, even the great Sherlock Holmes sometimes came up with a solution which could not have been deduction or induction, but no more or less than intuition.



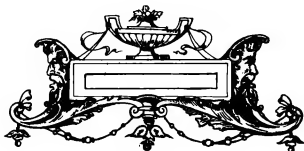
the circumstances. In addition to the unintentional slips, Dr. Watson was a Victorian gentleman who took care to conceal various matters which he considered improper to reveal, so that he frequently misleads us with full intent. (This is something which begins to show itself once you try to straighten out the unintentional errors.) Beneath the surface candor, there is a very slippery vagueness, and Watson shows himself to be quite a mysterious character indeed.

Early in the century, one Father Ronald Knox (who wrote at least one detective novel, and later translated the Bible), in a moment of irritation at what he considered to be sheer nonsense in some of the Bible criticism and analysis he had read, remarked that the methods of the "higher" Bible criticism could be applied as usefully and meaningfully to the Sherlock Holmes stories. Then, possibly fascinated by his own sudden insight, he wrote a couple of articles doing just that – and the results were

fascinating to not only himself, but to numerous other persons who had read the Sherlock Holmes tales. Thus it all started . . .

But the Father Brown series do not present the opportunities for rewarding effort in these directions. Not that a few slips might not be found – but Chesterton was a much more careful writer than A. Conan Doyle, who at one time admitted he wasn't particularly careful. The pastiches of Holmes by August Derleth (the Solar Pons stories) offer slender grounds for such digging, too. In fact, the only series of detective stories that I have read which might possibly offer some rewards for Irregular Inquiry, would be the Nero Wolfe series. Mr. Archie Goodwin is a most slippery fellow, and Wolfe himself . . .

But that will have to wait until next issue, when I intend to turn my attention to the genius who resides among his orchids on West 35th Street.



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